

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COISTE UM CHUNTAIS PHOIBLÍ COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Déardaoin, 19 Feabhra 2026

Thursday, 19 February 2026

The Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Cathy Bennett,	Deputy Paul McAuliffe,
Deputy Grace Boland,	Deputy Séamus McGrath,
Deputy Joanna Byrne,	Deputy Paul Murphy,
Deputy Aidan Farrelly,	Deputy Joe Neville.
Deputy James Geoghegan,	

DEPUTY JOHN BRADY IN THE CHAIR.

The committee met in private session until 10.06 a.m.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy (*An tArd Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste*) called and examined.

Business of Committee

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome everyone to today's meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts. Before we proceed, I will go through a few housekeeping matters.

Members are reminded of the provision within Standing Order 226 that the committee shall refrain from inquiring into the merits of a policy or policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government or the merits of the objectives of such policies. Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I also remind members of the constitutional requirement that, in order to participate in public meetings, members must be physically present within the confines of the Leinster House complex. Members of the committee attending remotely must do so from within the precincts of Leinster House.

The agenda for today is to discuss the minutes, accounts and statements, correspondence and upcoming meetings, and then we will suspend and begin our engagement with officials from the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration at 10.30 a.m. or thereabouts.

The minutes of the meeting of 12 February 2026 were agreed by the committee and these will be published on the committee's website.

There are 13 sets of accounts and financial statements laid between 9 and 13 February 2026, which are due to be considered today. We are joined by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, who is a permanent witness to the committee. I will ask the Comptroller and Auditor General to address these before opening the floor to members.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh.

The financial statements of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board for 2024 received a clear audit opinion.

The financial statements of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board for 2024 have received a clear audit opinion. I drew attention, however, to a material level of procurement non-compliance in that case.

The financial statements of Donegal Education and Training Board for 2024 received a clear audit opinion.

The financial statements of Louth and Meath Education and Training Board for 2024 received a clear audit opinion.

The financial statements of Tipperary Education and Training Board for 2024 received a clear audit opinion.

The accounts of the Health Service Executive consolidated patients' private property accounts for 2024 received a clear audit opinion. The committee may wish to be aware that

the turnover of the overall accounts was €43.8 million at the end of 2024. The balances held were €105 million.

The financial statements for 2024 of the special account for the purposes of the Health (Repayment Scheme) Act 2006 recorded nil turnover in the year and received a clear audit opinion.

The financial statements for the health repayment scheme donations fund for 2024 are a related account. Again there is a nil turnover in the year of account. Those received a clear audit opinion.

The financial statements for the circular economy fund for 2024 received a clear audit opinion. The balance in the fund at the end of 2024 is €18.5 million.

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland financial statements for 2024 received a clear audit opinion. However, I drew attention to a voluntary disclosure made to the Revenue Commissioners by the authority in relation to payments made to assessment panel members who should have been taxed under PAYE rules but were instead taxed under withholding tax rules. This disclosure resulted in a settlement with Revenue of a net €456,300.

Regarding the financial statements of Horse Racing Ireland, the group accounts for 2024 received a clear audit opinion.

The financial statements of the Loughs Agency, which is one of the North-South bodies, for 2024 received a clear audit opinion. I audit that jointly with the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland.

The financial statements of Cuan or An Ghníomhaireacht um Fhoréigean Baile, Gnéasach agus Inscnebhunaithe received a clear audit opinion also. This is a new body and it is the first period of account.

An Cathaoirleach: Thanks for that, Mr. McCarthy. Do members wish to comment or ask any questions about those accounts?

Deputy James Geoghegan: I have a question about the tax disclosure to Revenue. Is this common? Is this all related to the Supreme Court dominos, so to speak, for people who previously thought they were self-employed but found they were not? A lot of clubs are being forced to do this as well. Sports clubs are now making voluntary disclosures.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I think that is in the background to it. From memory, this may have preceded the Supreme Court decision. I think that was a 2024 opinion and this actually happened in 2024. It may have been in anticipation of it. I think the Supreme Court reaffirmed the position in relation to how such matters were to be determined. The authority made a disclosure. It identified it should have been applying a PAYE regime but it had been public sector withholding tax. The reason I am drawing attention to it is because the authority had been taxing the matter in the wrong way and it ended up paying €456,300 extra. If it had been doing it correctly from the beginning, the tax would have been paid by the individuals in receipt of the payments.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It was funded by the Department of higher education. I think when you go into the note that is how the tax payment was actually settled.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Effectively, yes, by additional funding. It is an additional expense.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is this an issue that is arising or coming forward in some of the other bodies Mr. McCarthy audits? I mean disclosures about wrong taxing.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I cannot recall any other cases where something similar has happened. It happens from time to time and, generally, I will call it out if it results in additional expenditure. If it is a matter that the tax liability is recovered from the employees, then it does not affect the body and it does not affect the Exchequer.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: In relation to the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, will Mr. McCarthy highlight the nature of the non-compliant procurement? Also, will he indicate if the overall value of the health service patient property fund is different from any previous year? He also mentioned the circular economy fund. I do not think we have had those responsible for that before the committee and I would appreciate a little more information, perhaps through the liaison officer, on the nature of that work. I believe there are a number of funding streams for that, like the plastic bag levy and possibly the coffee cup levy, and it would be worth examining.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It is the repurposed environment fund, so it would have been examined previously because I have referred in particular to a case involving the plastic bag levy. The committee has examined it with the Department of the environment in the past but we can certainly provide additional information. The financial statements themselves give a reasonable overview and a history of the account.

As for the Health Service Executive consolidated patients' private property account, this is money that belongs to people who are resident in long-stay care which is managed by the Health Service Executive on their behalf. As I said, the balance in the fund at the end of the year was about €105 million. I do not think it is that different from previous years. It would have been of the order of €100 million or maybe €98 million or €95 million in previous years. It is going up incrementally. A lot of the funds would originate from welfare payments to individuals that are kept on their behalf, but it is private funding at this stage.

Regarding the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, the total amount of non-compliant procurement disclosed is €1.37 million. Some examples of what that is made up of include €770,000 for cleaning services paid to one supplier, expenditure of €177,000 for ICT hardware paid to one supplier, €142,000 for static security paid to one supplier, €114,000 for ICT field engineering paid to two suppliers, €96,000 for ICT support services - it does not say how many suppliers in that case - and then expenditure of €65,000 for minor repairs and painting. Again, it does not----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Was part of the nature of the non-compliance that there was an absence of a tendering process?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Exactly, where there could have been. A lot of the steps that are being taken are effectively to run procurement competitions for that particular supply.

An Cathaoirleach: On the fund for long-term patients you referred to, Mr. McCarthy, there was a report this week about €33 million, I think, held in accounts by the HSE from former patients who had passed away. Would that be in this? Are you familiar with that?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: No, I did not see that report but I can certainly have a look at it and we can come back to it.

An Cathaoirleach: I think it was a huge figure of €33 million or something like that. The process for families to claim that money back was a little obscure, so it might be something to consider.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: For estates, there may be moneys that are held up while probate is being progressed, but obviously it would have to be the legal representative who recovered that funding. I will have a look and come back to you on it.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. Are members happy to move on? Do they agree to note the listing of accounts and financial statements? Agreed.

We will move to correspondence. There are three B items of correspondence to consider. No. R-2026-059 from the Department of justice provides details of the costs for continued maintenance of sites no longer considered suitable as IPAS centres.

Members are acutely aware the Department will be in with us shortly. If there are any issues raised in that correspondence, members can bring them up at that point. Is it agreed to note and publish that item? Agreed. Deputy Farrelly has flagged item No. R-2026-0063 from the Office of Public Works for discussion.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I thank the Cathaoirleach. I will be very brief because I know we are probably up against it, time-wise. In the correspondence provided, I noted an item regarding Hammond Lane and the much-awaited family courts project that is under way there. Before Christmas, the Government confirmed it is due for completion in 2027. I propose we write to the OPW seeking more details on that project, such as cost, delivery, the public-private nature of that and the expected timeframe associated with it from the agency's perspective.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed. On the topic of the OPW, it gave us more details about vacant OPW properties within the Phoenix Park. It states there are 11 vacant properties there which require upgrading, refurbishment or are not currently suitable for occupation. We need further information on those. What plan is in place to bring them into use and what is the timeframe for that? What is the estimated cost and purpose? The OPW also states that the vacancy periods vary, depending on the condition of the property, ranging from the early 2000s, which is 25 years ago now, to September 2025. That is important because we had a lot of discussion about the use of one of the properties in the Phoenix Park by the former Garda Commissioner, the process around the identification and the use of that property but also the cost involved in bringing that property back into use. More than €400,000 was spent bringing the property back into use and over €200,000 was spent for additional, enhanced security measures. The former Commissioner ended his tenure in September of last year. We need further information on the property, as they gave a range from the early 2000s to September 2025, which seems to correlate when the former Commissioner finished his tenure. The concern I have is that the property that had extensive work carried out to it is now possibly vacant. That would be a scandal on top of a scandal. We need further information from the OPW as to whether that property that extensive work had been carried out on is now lying vacant. If that is the case, what is the rationale for that and what are the plans to ensure that comes to an end and the huge expenditure on it means it will be put back into use. We need further information on that.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: In addition to that, could we also ask how much rent the OPW is getting for each of the properties that are rented out? Could we expand on that in the letter?

An Cathaoirleach: Yes. Are members happy to agree the proposed action of writing to the OPW to get that further information and publish the item? Agreed. No. R-2026-0068 is from the Health Service Executive. Deputy Farrelly has again flagged this item for discussion.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I thank the Cathaoirleach and I again will be very brief. Eyebrows were raised on my behalf when I saw the level of bad debt write-off from the HSE in the financial year 2023-2024. The detail of that merits further scrutiny on our behalf, especially when that coincides with information that we received that the HSE and hospitals continue to employ debt collectors to chase these fees. There is a lot of information absent about this very specific piece with regards to the HSE. I was also drawn to the point near the end where the HSE has included there is significant work under way to standardise and modernise their financial processes nationally. Could we request a note from the HSE about what that means in practice? What processes are under way? Who is doing that work for the HSE, at what cost and when does it expect those processes to be fully complete and rolled out?

An Cathaoirleach: Do members agree with that proposal? Agreed. Do members agree to publish the item of correspondence? Agreed.

We will move onto the work programme. Next week, on 26 February, the committee will engage in the first of its meetings with the Department of Education and Youth. We will discuss a number of items, including funding and governance matters relating to ETBs. The committee will later engage with the Department on 16 April and focus its examination on capital funding and expenditure relating to school properties.

We will move on to any other business. Are there any other items members wish to raise at this point?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Can I come back to the Cathaoirleach on the query he had about the patient private property fund? The media article was about these accounts. There is a disclosure that €33.5 million related to deceased or dormant account funds held at the end of 2024. There is €26 million in respect of 1,688 clients where estates have not yet or have failed to be identified. A sum of €8.9 million was paid out in 2024 in respect of such cases. There is €1.8 million in dormant client funds in respect of 6,654 clients whose whereabouts or status is unknown. Effectively, the funds remain suspended. On interest earned, there was €5.7 million in interest accumulated over the years, which has still to be distributed to 15,861 deceased clients or dormant accounts. In relation to that, €561,000 was paid out in 2024. There is a substantial part of that fund where, effectively, there are questions over who owns it.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. On foot of that information, I propose we write to the HSE. Is that who we should write to, Mr. McCarthy?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It is a feature of these accounts. It has been a feature over a number of years. I am not sure what the proceeding year figures would have been but they would have been substantial. It is just in the nature of the matter. Ultimately, there is a question over what point does it come to be surrendered as unclaimed funds.

An Cathaoirleach: We should write to get further information. There is a number of issues there and we will try to get clarity on them, such as how long some of these cases are and what

point is it determined that it will not go back to the estate. We might write to get further information. Is that agreed by members? Agreed.

That concludes session two. We will now suspend the meeting for five minutes.

Sitting suspended at 10.28 a.m. and resumed at 10.32 a.m.

Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022

Chapter 9 - Assessing Cyber Security in the Public Sector

Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2024

Chapter 9 - Criminal Justice Operational Hub

Chapter 10 - Management of International Protection Accommodation Contracts

Ms Oonagh McPhillips (*Secretary General, Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration*) called and examined.

An Cathaoirleach: This morning, we will engage with the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration to examine the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2022 - Chapter 9, assessing cyber security in the public sector; and the Report on the Accounts and of the Public Services 2024 - Chapter 9, the criminal justice operational hub, and Chapter 10, management of international protection accommodation contracts.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome Ms Oonagh McPhillips, Secretary General; Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan, deputy secretary general; Mr. Conor Rowley, assistant secretary general; Mr. Richard Dixon, director; Mr. David Delaney, assistant secretary general; Ms Fidelma Browne, principal officer; Mr. Neil Ward, assistant secretary general; and Mr. Richard Browne, director. We are also joined, from the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, by Ms Jenny Connors, principal officer, who is attending in a representative capacity. Finally, we are joined by officials from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, including the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, who is a permanent witness to the committee; and Ms Mairead Leyden, audit manager. The witnesses are all welcome to the meeting this morning.

Before we begin, I wish to explain some limitations to parliamentary privilege and the practice of the Houses as regards references the witnesses may make to other persons in their evidence. The evidence of witnesses physically present, or who give evidence from within the parliamentary precincts, is protected, pursuant to both the Constitution and statute, by absolute privilege. This means they have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. Witnesses are, however, expected not to abuse this privilege and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach to ensure that this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if witnesses' statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Witnesses are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable, or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity.

I call the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, to make his opening statement.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I do not propose to make an opening statement today. All of these items have previously been presented to the committee.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. McCarthy. I call the Secretary General to deliver the opening statement on behalf of the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. As set out in the letter of invitation, Ms McPhillips has five minutes to make her opening statement.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I thank the Chair for the invitation to assist the committee this morning. In the interests of the committee's time, I do not propose to repeat what I said in October on the 2024 accounts. It was circulated to members for their information at the time and I have sent it again this week.

Since we last met, the committee has corresponded with me and I hope the responses provided have been of assistance. I am happy to go into further details on these or other matters, as members require.

In its invitation, the committee highlighted the funding of Ukraine accommodation and related costs as an area it wished to discuss so I will concentrate on that in this brief opening statement.

As the committee will be aware, between 2022 and 2024, 114,000 people arrived in Ireland seeking temporary protection, having fled the war in Ukraine. Arrivals subsequently continued at a much reduced level so that we have, overall, received more than 126,000 people from Ukraine to date, with an estimated 80,000 remaining in the State. This precipitated the largest humanitarian response in the history of the State, with a remarkable response seen from Government, State agencies and civil society, and from local communities and organisations right across the country. I am proud of the work done by colleagues across all the public service in that regard.

The war in Ukraine, as well as the concurrent increase in applications for international protection and an ongoing housing crisis, all placed exceptional demands on the State's protection and accommodation systems and required a major operational scale-up. This meant that emergency sourcing of a wide range of accommodation options was essential. The then Accounting Officer previously informed this committee that the emergency accommodation sourced to support people from Ukraine in 2022 included hotels, bed and breakfast accommodation, guest houses, hostels, self-catering accommodation, repurposed and refurbished buildings, sports centres and arenas, scouting facilities, properties offered by religious and voluntary bodies, student accommodation, military facilities, temporary tented facilities and local authority emergency rest centres, as well as accommodation pledged in people's homes or available housing.

At peak, the Ukraine response was providing State accommodation directly for over 60,000 people, and supporting additional numbers through the accommodation recognition payment,

ARP, scheme. Since it commenced in 2022, the ARP scheme has supported the accommodation of some 63,000 people outside of State-contracted accommodation. In 2024, approximately €141.5 million was issued to some 15,000 hosts accommodating 34,500 beneficiaries.

Approximately 42,000 people are currently living in almost 23,500 hosted arrangements with the support of the scheme. The ARP scheme is currently in place until 31 March 2026 but may be extended by ministerial order in accordance with the governing legislation.

Since 2024, that emergency has receded and the scaling-up has become a gradual decline, as things began to change for the Ukrainian people here, and in the wider circumstances of the war. Many people who were in State-supported accommodation, all of whom have access to the labour market, began to source their own accommodation independently. Some people chose to return to Ukraine, or to move to other countries, often reuniting with family or friends. The trend since 2024 up to the current time is one of gradual reduction in demand and, therefore, in the cost to the State.

In 2024, an allocation of €1.429 billion was provided for Ukraine accommodation which was then in Vote 40, the former Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This allocation was reduced to €1.226 billion in the Supplementary Estimate that year. By the end of the year, the ultimate outturn for 2024 was further reduced to €1.165 billion, an overall reduction of €264 million on the original allocation.

The savings in this area were primarily attributable, as I have outlined, to reduced demand for commercial accommodation, which enabled a consolidation of the commercial accommodation portfolio. This included proactive measures, such as contract terminations, and rate and vacancy reductions, which continue to deliver cost savings.

A total of €738 million in funding transferred into the Justice Vote on 1 May 2025 and since then the costs have further reduced, bringing the allocation to €727 million in the Supplementary Estimate. The provisional outturn for 2025 was €719 million, and a provision of €607 million has been made available in respect of Ukraine accommodation for this year.

This still represents a very considerable cost in terms of public money, though reducing, as I have outlined. The committee will be aware that, combined with the over 33,000 residents currently supported by IPAS, and ongoing housing shortages across society, there remains great pressure on accommodation services in the State at this time.

The Ukraine and international protection accommodation teams have worked in parallel through these very intense times, and have delivered safety and shelter for many tens of thousands of people in urgent need. As the pressure began to reduce on both teams since 2024, good progress has been made on improving governance and achieving better value for money for the State.

While temporary protection remains in place across the EU until 2027, my Department is advancing measures, as outlined in the EU Council recommendation, for a co-ordinated and phased transition out of temporary protection. This is being progressed across government and in close liaison with other member states, with the aim of supporting Ukraine and those who have fled the war there. I am happy to go into further detail as members require.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Ms McPhillips for that. Please note that we will suspend the meeting at 12 noon for ten to 15 minutes for a short break. We will resume shortly thereafter.

I will now open the floor to members. The lead speaker today is Deputy Neville, who has 15 minutes. All other members have ten minutes. If time permits at the end, we will allow members back in for a short supplementary round of questions at that point.

Deputy Joe Neville: I thank the witnesses for coming in today, especially so soon after their previous appearance. The Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. McCarthy, alluded to that when he said he did not have an opening statement because the witnesses had been before the committee previously. This follow-up meeting to our previous meeting is due to the scale of spending in the Department. As a country, and as a group of individuals here, we are trying to get our heads around the spend because it is so unusual in the context of the characteristics of how the State is run and spends money. In the previous meeting, much of the conversation was about IPAS spending. We said we would focus on the Ukrainian spend today. We will cover all areas because money has not been spent in this way before. The figures McPhillips mentioned are huge, so we might go through some of those big numbers from the last number of years. While we will look towards 2025 and 2026 spending, we are obviously focusing on the financial statements from 2024.

The system has been put in place and a lot of people have benefited financially from it. The Department has looked after a lot of people too, and I am very conscious of the people the State has looked. At the same time, a lot of individuals have made significant money and become significantly wealthy from this. That is why there is significant interest in how the State is spending its money. The industry around IPAS and Ukrainian housing has grown at astonishing rates as well. That is why we are focusing on it.

I wish to clarify the numbers. Sometimes, there is a question about the Ukraine spend and the spend on IPAS. The Department differentiates between them but people sometimes work on the assumption that there is one number for both areas. Can the Department clarify the Ukrainian versus IPAS spend in 2024?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: In 2024, the IPAS total spend was €1.06 billion. The Ukraine spend in 2024 was €1.164 billion. Between the two, it was €2.2 billion.

Deputy Joe Neville: Does that €2.2 billion all go to third-party contractors?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No. I mean-----

Deputy Joe Neville: That is all right. I just wanted clarity. Ms McPhillips can tell me. I am just asking the question.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Sure.

Deputy Joe Neville: If it is not all going to third parties, how much of it is?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will deal with the Ukraine and IPAS figures separately, if that is okay, because that is the way it is accounted for.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is perfect. That is the best way to do it.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: In relation to Ukraine, the commercial accommodation split of that is €861 million, which is 74%, in 2024-----

Deputy Joe Neville: When Ms McPhillips describes-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Sorry, I would like to complete it because there is another big chunk. The accommodation recognition payment, ARP, is €146 million. It supports people hosting people in their homes. That is about 12.5%.

Deputy Joe Neville: Of the €1.164 billion spend in 2024, Ms McPhillips is saying that €800 million was for accommodation.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes, €800 million was for commercial accommodation.

Deputy Joe Neville: Yes, commercial accommodation. The rest was payments to individuals who are-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is payments to people who are hosting people in their homes.

Deputy Joe Neville: Yes, but they are all-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Sorry, that is not the rest of it; it is another 12%. We also have payments to local authorities, totalling €40.5 million, facility management costs, Ukraine support costs, Citywest and support services, as well as a capital spend. In total, the spend is €1.164 billion, of which €861 million is commercial.

Deputy Joe Neville: In fairness, I said third party rather than commercial. It is all third-party spend, whether individual or commercial. It is people who are not the State, as such.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That figure of €861 million is, yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is commercial.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: My point is that it is not all commercial.

Deputy Joe Neville: Yes, I know. I just said third party. It is individuals as well. It could encompass someone sitting in this room who might rent out accommodation and have someone in their house. It is just accommodation. That is the point. We are spending €2.24 billion.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: In 2024.

Deputy Joe Neville: What was the spend in 2025?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I might ask Mr. Rowley to come in because I am sure he is much more fluid on this than I am.

Mr. Conor Rowley: In 2025, the commercial accommodation spend had reduced to €452.380 million from €861 million, as the Secretary General said. The pledge, which is the accommodation recognition payment, increased to €186.401 million. We had an increase in the number of applications for the accommodation recognition payment.

Deputy Joe Neville: In 2025, there more ordinary individuals looking to house people from Ukraine in 2025 than there were in 2024.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: Why is that increasing if the other number is going down?

Mr. Conor Rowley: We are actively trying to move people to ARP accommodation. It is far more efficient and effective from an integration point of view, and it is far cheaper. ARP accommodation per night is €11 compared to €50 per night for commercial accommodation.

Deputy Joe Neville: Jesus. It is four and a half times the price. What accounts for that difference?

Mr. Conor Rowley: There is a good will payment paid to ARP hosts, which is €600. It has been reduced from €800. That is where people are housed in rooms in houses. Commercial accommodation is, by its nature, far more expensive in terms of hotel settings, etc.

Deputy Joe Neville: Will that top out at about €750 million or €800 million in total between the two?

Mr. Conor Rowley: No. The spends are €452 million and €186 million. I am trying to do quick maths on that.

Deputy Joe Neville: When the local authority cost is added, it is about €700 million.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes. That is coming down in our forecast for 2026 as well. The trajectory of accommodation in commercial settings can be seen to be decreasing substantially.

Deputy Joe Neville: What are the figures for IPAS in 2025?

Mr. Conor Rowley: I will defer to Mr. Delaney in that regard.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I am open to correction but the spend on the ARP is €191 million for 2025.

Mr. Conor Rowley: That is correct. There is a decrease in the commercial accommodation but an increase in the ARP.

Deputy Joe Neville: I know.

Mr. Conor Rowley: There has been no net growth since December. There are far more people accommodated under the accommodation recognition payment scheme and there is better value for money in terms of what we are paying.

Deputy Joe Neville: The ARP is four and a half times cheaper.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The other consideration, as the Deputy will recall, is that the use of commercial accommodation was blocking a lot of tourism infrastructure, such as hotels, bed and breakfasts accommodation and so forth. There was a policy move away from that. The proportions have changed quite substantially.

Deputy Joe Neville: What was the largest amount of money given to any individual? I know we looked at that before with the IPAS spend where the highest amount received was up to €50 million. Is it similar with the Ukraine money? Were there people-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There are companies that have been paid quite a lot of money. Does Mr. Rowley have that number handy?

Mr. Conor Rowley: I do not have it to hand but there are not just individual providers but groups that have accommodation and hotels within their group that were paid a significant amount in the past.

Deputy Joe Neville: I ask for a list of those. We saw a list showing that six or seven providers accounted for €250 million of the IPAS spend. I am just curious to see that.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: In the Ukraine spend, the highest payment is €30.7 million. That is at December 2025. The next ones are €12.4 million, €10.4, million, €9.1 million and €7.6 million. They are slightly smaller than the IPAS equivalent. Obviously, it is a different service that is being contracted.

Deputy Joe Neville: What was the IPAS spending in 2025?

Mr. David Delaney: The figures to hand are that we spent €1.22 billion on current expenditure and about €150 million on capital expenditure in 2025.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is pretty similar. I assume the capital expenditure relates to Citywest.

Mr. David Delaney: Predominately, yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: Where do we see that trending for this year?

Mr. David Delaney: I can confirm that our profile for 2026 is €1.18 billion. It is slightly lower. We are currently trending in that direction.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is sitting above the €1 billion mark.

Mr. David Delaney: It is, of course.

Deputy Joe Neville: When it comes to the changes in immigration, the point of the new immigration Bill is to reduce waiting times for applications.

Should we see that pulling people out of the system and allowing them to go through more quickly? What is the waiting time for a decision to be made on someone going through?

Mr. David Delaney: There are probably two ways of analysing that. There is the length of time someone has been in international protection accommodation and, separately, there might be statistics around how long someone has been waiting for a first-instance decision, an appeal or a final decision. The figure I have to hand is that the typical time someone is in IPAS accommodation at the moment is about 24 months, but I am open to correction on that. The Deputy made the point about processing being quicker if people's time in accommodation was less. That would have a knock-on effect of reducing costs but we would have to see that work through the system.

Deputy Joe Neville: Do we have an idea of the monthly cost per individual?

Mr. David Delaney: The average contracted rate is €71 per person per night with the third party and commercial contractors we have at the moment.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It might be helpful to give the numbers that were in accommodation at the end of December 2024 and the end of December 2025. There were more people in

accommodation at the end of December 2025. We contracted those buildings earlier, so they are at a more expensive rate. The costs are coming down over the course of-----

Deputy Joe Neville: How many people were in accommodation as at 31 December 2025?

Mr. David Delaney: Just over 33,000.

Deputy Joe Neville: How many were there in 2024?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That was 32,700.

Deputy Joe Neville: Where do we think it will be at the end of 2026?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We do not have a crystal ball at the moment but it will be in or around that. We are trying to drive it down. Obviously, the speeding-up in processing that Mr. Delaney has referenced is contributing to that. Costs are coming down as well, though, which is a different thing. As Mr. Delaney mentioned, there are different ways of looking at this and the overall cost will come down in the cost of 2026 as we move out of those more expensive historical contracts into better value contracts.

Deputy Joe Neville: I want to change tack. There was a Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, case management system and €2.1 million was spent on that. I believe the contract with the delivery partner was terminated in August 2025. What is the situation with that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: They are regrouping on that. I might ask Mr. Ward to come in on that if that is okay.

Mr. Neil Ward: The first business case for this project came in in May 2022. Subject to some tweaks, it was approved in August 2022. There was then a significant enough period of procurement and the contract was eventually awarded in February 2024 to a company called Codec.

Deputy Joe Neville: We have heard of that company here before.

Mr. Neil Ward: That is the key delivery partner, yes. It was procured as the delivery partner. There were also other providers doing business analysis and project management work.

Deputy Joe Neville: Do we have a system from the €2.1 million spent?

Mr. Neil Ward: The system is not yet built, but of that €2.1 million, our assessment is that about three quarters of the spend to date remains of value and will contribute to the completion of the system ultimately. Where it stands at the moment is that Fiosrú is considering options as to how to replace Codec-----

Deputy Joe Neville: I am conscious of my time. Is Codec gone now?

Mr. Neil Ward: Yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: Codec was in place and €2.1 million was spent-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: But not all to Codec. That is an important point.

Deputy Joe Neville: Okay, fine. Was it overseeing the project?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No.

Mr. Neil Ward: It was the delivery partner.

Deputy Joe Neville: Mr. Ward just mentioned its name. I did not even ask about who it was, so I thought it might have been running it.

Mr. Neil Ward: The amount it received was €525,000.

Deputy Joe Neville: The Department expects, therefore, that there will be a write-off of that €525,000. The project was costed initially at €4.4 million. Where do we think it is now?

Mr. Neil Ward: I expect that when Fiosrú figures out a way back to market to identify a new provider, it will eventually require a change request to alter that budget, but that depends on what the market produces.

Deputy Joe Neville: We do not know; it could be anything. We have written off €500,000 and the final budget might end up being a lot higher.

I am looking at a few other items. In respect of Forensic Science Ireland's application for DNA sample handling, there was an approved budget of €760,000. The final project cost was €2.7 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Neil Ward: Yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: That was €2 million over.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It became a different project, I suppose.

Mr. Neil Ward: One hundred percent. At the very outset, that was a project designed to replace an Excel sheet with very complex macros built into it, which was unstable and a risk--

Deputy Joe Neville: No, I get it. I am just trying to see if there is a trend, that is all. Because there was also the establishment of the independent Gambling Regulatory Authority, where there was an approved budget of €1.2 million and a final project cost of €2.6 million.

Mr. Neil Ward: That was a project overseen by our portfolio oversight committee but not an IT project. The costs actually relate to the staffing costs of establishing the new regulator.

Deputy Joe Neville: It was time spent.

Mr. Neil Ward: It was time.

Deputy Joe Neville: Was the capitalised cost there?

Mr. Neil Ward: The legislation took longer to come through than anticipated, so the staff were actually on site for longer than we had anticipated at the start.

Deputy Joe Neville: For the organisation dashboard, there was an approved budget of €1.6 million and a final project cost of €2.3 million. That was a €700,000 overrun.

Mr. Neil Ward: Again, that was a scope change during the project. A change request was raised. It went through all of our government structures. The scope change was approved and with that there was a resulting increase in cost.

Deputy Joe Neville: Overall, there was about €4 or €5 million of overruns on those and I have only named four projects. I am not saying there are more but there possibly could be.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I think those are the only ones for which the Deputy will find significant overruns, because we reported on those. The way in which it was managed needs to be understood in terms of the governance. There was very tight governance on it. Those were requests that were acceded to rather than let overrun, if that makes sense.

Mr. Neil Ward: Every change request made in relation to a project is treated as if it were a stand-alone business case. It is subject to examination by both the technical and financial review group we have in the Department and an oversight committee, which is a subcommittee of our management board and includes external members. People are required to really document in serious terms any proposed change to the scope, time or budget of a project. It is really rigorously analysed.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: And lots of them are refused.

Deputy Joe Neville: No, I get that. This is not a question but, lastly, at the previous meeting, Ryevale House came up quite a bit. The Department has made changes since then and I want to acknowledge that.

I saw the announcement about Ms McPhillips in the news. I offer her my best wishes for her future role. I thank her for coming in twice over the past while.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No problem.

Deputy Joe Neville: I just wanted to acknowledge those things.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I welcome everyone here today. Is there an update on the domestic violence refuge centres in Cavan and Monaghan. Has anything happened in relation to the opening of either of those yet?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I should apologise because I misspoke on the last day. I mixed up my refuges with my safe homes. There is, as the Deputy knows, a project in Monaghan to build a refuge, which is ongoing. There are safe home projects in both counties but not a refuge in Cavan at the moment. They are still looking for that. Apologies for that.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Again, Cavan and Monaghan are two of nine counties in the whole of Ireland that have no refuges.

The Minister told me one day in the Chamber that the first person to leave the home should be the perpetrator and this is not often the case. Will Ms McPhillips outline what the Department is doing about that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Quite a bit of policy work is going on around that. Obviously, it should not be the case that the person who suffers the violence has to leave the home. We try to support people to stay in their homes but there are legal and constitutional issues around ownership of the home and so forth, so there is quite a bit of policy work going on-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What is it?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: -----as part of one of the actions under the domestic violence-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What is the action?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The action is to examine how best to support people to stay in their homes and how we can reverse the trend.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Okay. I was looking at the books. There was an underspend of €2.1 million, or more than 56%, on Cuan arising from delays in onboarding staff. What would have caused those delays? If we are working so hard to ensure women are not being left in the home with perpetrators, why has €2.1 million not been used?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That was 2024. Cuan was established at the beginning of 2024. It started the year with 17 staff and now it has 35 staff. We have funded it for another ten staff to grow further in the course of this year, 2026. The year 2024 was very much the start-up year. We took in staff from the existing functions and we were building it up over the course of the year but there was a great deal of priority attached to it and very enthusiastic people working there as well.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I thank Ms McPhillips for that but she can understand my frustration that we have nothing in Cavan and Monaghan.

Every time I ask anybody, they say we are building towards it and that we are going to get a domestic violence refuge. This has been going since since I was on Monaghan County Council in 2012 and there is still no domestic abuse refuge or safe homes, as Ms McPhillips said.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: But there is a site for the refuge in Monaghan and there is work ongoing on that at the moment, so there is progress.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What timeline is there on that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will come back to the Deputy on a timeline.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I thank Ms McPhillips very much. I appreciate that.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The Garda in Cavan-Monaghan supports victims very well and does a lot of work. Safe Ireland is involved up there as well and it does a huge amount of work to support victims. I take the Deputy's point, though.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I appreciate that. I thank Ms McPhillips.

I will move on. I commend all the people who have opened up their homes to the Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary international protection following Russia's brutal and criminal invasion of Ukraine. The manner, however, in which the ARP scheme has operated has been a source of criticism and frustration. Noting that the Government at different points has increased and decreased the payment rate, will Ms McPhillips outline what the initial payment was benchmarked against and why there were adjustments following that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I am not sure I can because the scheme was in the other Department in 2022 when it was established, so I am just not familiar with-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Was it €800 at one time and then it went down to €600?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It started at €400 and it went to €800, and then a decision was taken to reduce it to €600 in June 2025.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Does Ms McPhillips know what the reason was for that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The reason was to try to get better value for the State.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Why did it jump from €400 to €800?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There was also a perception that it was interfering with the private rental market. Conor might want to take that one. He might be familiar with the reason for the change in 2025.

Mr. Conor Rowley: I think it relates to the offer a home scheme. That was a local authority-based scheme where people offered a whole home to people who had fled the war in Ukraine. It was felt that €800 was a suitable price for that. As a result, the ARP was increased in line with it, to cover that.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Who made the decision or why was the decision made that it should be tax-free?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It was a Government decision at the time. It was a policy decision. I will just bring the Deputy through the history of it, if that is any help, because it has, as she says, varied quite a lot. In 2022, €10 million was paid out in respect of 4,000 hosts, which accommodated 8,000 people at that time. To contrast that with 2025, we paid out €187 million to accommodate 42,000 people, with 17,500 hosts involved in it.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What about the year in which the Department was paying €800? Which year was that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We were paying €800 for half of 2025. In 2023, the total cost was €71 million. There were 9,000 hosts and 20,000 people. In 2024, the cost was €141 million, with 15,000 hosts and 34,500 people. The scheme has been very successful in accommodating people because it has, as I was explaining to Deputy Neville-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: It has been successful for the landlords that were incentivised, as they did not have to pay any tax.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: From the beginning of the Ukraine war, an awful lot of people have accommodated Ukrainians in their homes, and this-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Why was it not taxed? Why did the landlords not have to pay any tax?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That was a policy decision by the Government at the time. I cannot say anything further than that.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: On what basis was the payment paid out without the Ukrainian people who were moving into the houses being means-tested?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: This payment is made to hosts rather than Ukrainian people. It is made in respect of them hosting Ukrainian people in their houses.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: After a year or two years, did the Department ever look back at or review Ukrainian people who are now working here?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: This money is not paid to Ukrainian people. It is paid to the people who are hosting them.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: In that case, we will go back to the landlords that are getting the money. Was a review of the tenants they had in their houses ever done?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: They have to produce evidence that they are hosting the person. Conor might confirm if that is fair.

Mr. Conor Rowley: It is. It is important to say-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Has a review been done over the four or five years? I have heard that there are people from Ukraine who have very good salaries, who are working here as doctors and nurses, and their landlord is still getting the ARP, but no means test has been done on it and they automatically get their rent paid.

Mr. Conor Rowley: First, there is no means test. It is not necessarily rent. It is a goodwill payment to the host for opening up their accommodation. There is no tenancy agreement in place. It is a goodwill payment paid to people.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Are top-up payments made to landlords as well?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Not that we are aware of, and not that we would recommend. There is a licensing agreement perhaps between the host and the person staying with them in the property. They may give additional money for miscellaneous things like washing.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I just want to go back to the review. If somebody who has come here from Ukraine is working in a really good job, are they still getting their rent paid?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: They are not getting the payment.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: They are not getting the payment but their rent is still being paid. They have no rent payment.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is not rent, as Conor was saying.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I know it is an ARP. When somebody comes here and they start work, are they being reviewed or means-tested in any way or are they just getting the rent payment?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The way I would look at it, as Conor said to Deputy Neville, is that the cost to the State is €11 a night, compared with €50 a night in commercial accommodation. That is where the value to the State lies. It is accommodating 42,000 people at the moment.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Were any new contracts signed after 2024?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I might ask Conor to take that. The contracts have been reducing.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Not since mid-2024. The only contracts we have entered into are that we have recontracted a number of 90-day designated accommodation centres, which are now 30-day accommodation centres.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Do we have a list of them?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes, we do have a list of them.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Could I have that at some stage, if not today?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes, absolutely. I could read them out to the Deputy now if she wants.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Okay, that would be great.

Mr. Conor Rowley: We have ones in Punchestown, Firbank, Wallslough in Kilkenny, Inchmore in Offaly, and Kill and Newhall, both in Kildare. What happened there was that we had a significant increase in people fleeing the war in Ukraine, attributable to a law that was relaxed in Ukraine, which allowed men between the ages of 18 and 22 to travel. As a result, from August to October, we saw about 2,000 young people coming into the country, so we had to stand up those designated accommodation centres to cater for them.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I thank Conor and everyone.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I thank all the witnesses for being with us again so soon after the last time. We usually say the nice things at the end but I will say them at the beginning. I acknowledge what Deputy Neville said about Ms McPhillips's departure. In her time before the committee, she has always given us a very good engagement. If she is lucky enough in her next role, she might be before us again in some other guise - or unlucky enough.

If he does not mind, I will refer back to Mr. Delaney. In October, we discussed the OECD report in regard to the Development Assistance Committee's cost-per-refugee figure. I am interested in how we compare with other OECD countries. At that stage we were the second highest - I think it was the 2022 figure - per head at just under €20,000 and the UK was at about €25,000 per head. Does he have any indication of where the figures for Ireland might be now? Has the Department given any consideration to that data and to why we are such an outlier in the sense that the cost per head seems to be so much higher?

Mr. David Delaney: That is a very good question. I had a quick glance at the report again in advance of this meeting. If we look at the report, there are some countries that I know for a fact are accommodating asylum seekers but their cost per asylum seeker is zero. To be honest, I could not even point to where the ballpark Irish figures mentioned for 2022 and 2023 came from. Equally so, when I look at countries that I have visited and where I have spoken to colleagues at my level, the money they are spending and the number of people they are accommodating does not line up with the report. I would have doubts about making assumptions-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I think it indicates there were at least seven countries that had not reported.

Mr. David Delaney: And some had reported very low costs that did not remotely add up. I must admit I have looked into it a bit further to try to find reasons, but I have not been able to find reasons. Some appear, but I would not want to use assumptions.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: The question is whether the Department has examined that question. There are a lot of questions around the way we have contracted, the way it had to be done in such a speedy manner, the whole idea of not having the normal procurement compliance and so on. Has the Department examined where it is in terms of other-----

Mr. David Delaney: The lesson learnt from that work is that countries that run their systems well and cost-effectively have predominantly State-owned accommodation. We are definitely

moving in that direction. We have gone from 900 applicants living in State accommodation to now having nearly 4,000 State accommodation beds. We intend to continue that comprehensive accommodation strategy policy. That is the right thing to do from an Irish perspective, and I think it reflects lessons learnt from-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: On the previous occasion, the Department indicated that for the State accommodation we have, the price was nearly half that charged by the private contractors.

Mr. David Delaney: In addition, we are also in the process of continuing the implementation of our rate card, so we have seen a reduction of 26% in renewed and renegotiated contracts.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: When do we believe we will no longer be reliant on private contractors and moving towards a State system?

Mr. David Delaney: Unfortunately, that is definitely a medium- to long-term crystal ball. I would not be able to put a timeline on that. There are too many variables at play to be able to point to that.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Given the significant cost, it should be a priority for the Department to be moving-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The overall objective is 14,000 State-owned places by 2028. We are working towards that.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: What is the current capacity?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is 4,000 in State-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: What is the current total capacity of public and private?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is 33,000.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Even the 2028 objective is less than half.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The objective is also to process people faster, especially under the forthcoming pact.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: My question is how it is not more of an objective to try to reduce the costs. Everyone is saying that a State facility is cheaper and represents better value for money for the taxpayer, but we do not seem to have an objective to reach that, even by 2028.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I do not think we would want to be accommodating 33,000-plus people going forward. That is not the policy objective. The policy objective is to reduce the number in accommodation and to get them-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: The belief is that the 14,000 would be sufficient.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We will always probably need some flex, and the private sector is best placed to do that. We do not want to have empty places lying around the place. My successor would be in here a lot if that were the case. The objective is to bring down the number in accommodation and to have the best value.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: From the Department's perspective, given that it is not relying on other countries' information, what is the cost per head per refugee in Ireland?

Mr. David Delaney: As I mentioned to Deputy Neville, we have that contract cost of €71 per person per night. When you factor in-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I am talking about the annual cost.

Mr. David Delaney: For the annual cost, especially with the purchase of Citywest being in that annual cost, it is a bit more difficult to determine the exact cost.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I do not expect the Department to have the figure here. I am using the OECD example, so it is a cost per head per year per refugee. The Department might see if it can identify what that figure is. I accept that there are a lot of variables. The Department might come back to us in writing.

Mr. David Delaney: From that timeframe, I definitely would not have confidence in the figure in the OECD report. I do not know how many variables were included.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I accept that. Given that it was indicating that even the Irish figure is not clear, I am asking the Department to come back to us in writing on what the Irish figure is per year.

Again, I am trying to look at the idea of the cost for State accommodation. Anybody who comes out of international protection is fully entitled to apply for housing. I recently met with the DRHE in regard to some of the Dublin figures. There is increasingly an interplay between exit from international protection and those people who are in homeless accommodation. I want to touch on the interaction between the Department of justice, the Department of housing and the costs. Ultimately, they are both State services that are provided.

The indicator from the DRHE for the Dublin figures was that 36% of people in homeless accommodation were non-EEA. In 2025, the reasons given for people being made homeless indicated that, for families, 6.3% were due to leaving direct provision, and 8% were due to family reunification, so both were related to the Department of justice. However, 25% of single people made homeless in Dublin in 2024 were leaving direct provision. That is a significant number. Is that a consequence of us now processing applications more quickly? Is there structural engagement between the Department of justice and the Department of housing with regard to the number of people leaving direct provision and entering homelessness?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: If people have status and an entitlement that is derived from status, we do not exit people into homelessness. That is the bottom line. Mr. Delaney can go into more detail.

Mr. David Delaney: I am happy to clarify that. To be clear, nobody is moved out of direct provision with status. We accommodate people. We are accommodating 5,000 people who have refugee status.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Does the Department accommodate them outside of the homeless services?

Mr. David Delaney: We do. Just to give you a sense-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: The figure from the DRHE is that 25% of single people who presented as homeless cited leaving direct provision. How does that tally with what the Department says about how people are accommodated?

Mr. David Delaney: We work very closely with the DRHE and Department of housing colleagues, so I can give the Deputy confidence on that. I think the statistic is that someone who had previously lived in direct provision is now presenting as homeless, as opposed to the idea that they had left direct provision and then presented as homeless.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I am looking at the figures from the DRHE. I realise they are private figures, but this is a report that it produced itself. It says that for single adults, the top reason in 2025 was leaving direct provision. This applied to 427 individuals, which is 25%.

Mr. David Delaney: When we have discussed that with colleagues, the slightly summarised detailed explanation is that they have left IPAS accommodation in the preceding six months. We have had a few different versions of that, such as in the preceding six months, the preceding eight months or the preceding ten months. It definitely is not the case that people walked out and walked in.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Directly.

Mr. David Delaney: We are looking for more detail from colleagues. I would argue that while it might be a fact that they have left international protection accommodation in the preceding six or eight months, it might very well be the case that the other categories of reasons for requiring homeless accommodation may suit. It could be that they left international protection accommodation, got into a valid lease, and then, when it expired or there was a problem, found themselves homeless. There is nuance within it as well.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: As I say, I am exploring this.

Mr. David Delaney: To give a broader figure, in the past two and a half years or so, 11,000 people have left international protection accommodation with status. We are working through the percentage figures to make sure they are accurate, but it is still a very small proportion of the overall number who have managed to integrate into communities well, whether through private rented accommodation, HAP or otherwise.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: With regard to the supports, all IPAS residents with status are assigned access to a housing support officer to help them to work out their accommodation. They are not exited into homelessness.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: If people are being placed and subsequently, within six or eight months, are presenting to the DRHE as homeless, there was obviously an issue with the way they were placed, given they are presenting so quickly.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I think most of the population finds some of the accommodation very precarious at times, or their employment status might be different, or whatever. People's circumstances change.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: It is significant that 25% of single people presenting as homeless in the past year cited leaving direct provision. There may be a nuance in that, but my point is that it is significant. I do not have time to explore it. The reason I raise this matter is that there is a cost to providing direct provision and a cost to providing emergency accommodation. We should be looking at those two costs while also acknowledging the rights of people who are fully entitled to housing.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We are trying to look at stability as well. Moving more people into more mainstream, stable accommodation is in our interest because we have people in direct provision, as Mr. Delaney said, who have an entitlement to move out and are trying to move out. It would present better value for us if they were able to move into more stable accommodation. That is an objective for us, absolutely.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the witnesses for attending. Inevitably, there will be some repetition in the questioning. My apologies for that.

On the accommodation that is provided, we have approximately 80,000 at present. That seems to have been the case for some time. Is that a relatively static figure at this point in time?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I am not sure that it is the same 80,000 but the number is roughly the same.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: The number is quite static, yes. Please explain. Are we seeing new presentations from Ukraine?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes. Through the course of 2025 we would have seen that and Mr. Rowley will give the numbers.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Close to 6,000 people came in from Ukraine in 2025. Obviously some people leave and go home to Ukraine or go to another member state.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: If 6,000 Ukrainians came it, did approximately the same number leave? I ask because 80,000 seems to have been the figure for some time now.

Mr. Conor Rowley: To clarify, there are 84,000 people here right now.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Please clarify the following again. How much of the accommodation is directly provided by the State?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Roughly 23,000 people are in State-contracted accommodation. I have the numbers.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is that 23,000 out of 84,000?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is 23,000 people.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Then 40,000 people are in ARP-supported accommodation, give or take. Mr. Rowley can correct me if I am wrong, by all means.

Mr. Conor Rowley: As part of that, 2,500 people are housed in rapid-build housing developments across eight different sites.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Of the 23,000 people in State accommodation, how many centres are we talking about?

Mr. Conor Rowley: We currently have 560 contracts. That is a good estimation of where we are at. We have reduced that by 50%. We were at over 1,000.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: To give us the sense of scale, who or what is the biggest provider of accommodation?

Mr. Conor Rowley: We have one hotel in Dublin that has 1,300 people from Ukraine housed there.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Has that been the case for a number of years?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is that the biggest provider?

Mr. Conor Rowley: That is the biggest. We have had other big ones in places such as Youghal, down in the Deputy's neck of the woods, where we had a significant amount of people there. Obviously we were moving people out as well and relocating.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: In terms of the hotel with 1,300 people, what is the annual cost provided to that entity?

Mr. Conor Rowley: That is about €24 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: One provider has received €24 million for providing accommodation to Ukrainians.

My next issue is international protection. We have seen the trend whereby in 2024 it cost €1.76 billion and in 2025 it cost €1.2 billion. As it is early days the Department does not know the figure for 2026 but what is the provision or budget allocation?

Mr. David Delaney: In terms of current expenditure, €1.18 billion has been provided for in 2026 and a further €40 million for capital expenditure.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is a relatively stable outlay expected this year?

Mr. David Delaney: An ever so slight drop in stabilisation, Deputy.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: In response to a parliamentary question, the Minister outlined that there were over 300 centres involved in international protection.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That is right.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Ms McPhillips answered my question earlier but again, how much of the accommodation is directly provided by the State versus private provided? Can she clarify the breakdown please?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There is roughly 4,000 people in State-provided accommodation and the remainder-----

Mr. Neil Ward: It is 29,000.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: -----29,000 people are in contracted accommodation.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Who is the biggest provider of accommodation in respect of international protection? What is the name of the entity and what is the scale?

Mr. David Delaney: Looking at the list of top providers, Deputy, there are a few around the €25 million mark such as the Holiday Inn, around €25 million; Mosney Holidays €25 million; and Guestford Limited, around €25 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is there any concern about how much one provider can get and would alarm bells ring?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is important to note that it is not all profit. They provide a service for that.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I understand that.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Let us consider one of them. Mosney has been a very stable provider for more than 25 years. It has provided an awful lot of accommodation and services for a lot of people.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is it appropriate for one provider to grow in terms of the services they provide?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The test is whether the service is adequate and these are inspected services.

Mr. David Delaney: One of the findings from the Comptroller and Auditor General's chapter was that if we could contract and maintain services with companies that are experienced in this space and know how to do the business then we can have trust. We had over 400 inspections last year so there is a robust inspection regime. It is about quality of service provision foremost and then having confidence in the work that is being done. Having people in this business is not a bad thing, Deputy.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Again, in some parliamentary replies, the Minister has indicated that the average processing time for international protection is around 24 months.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: As I understand it, we have signed up to the EU agreements and in June of this year that is to be reduced significantly to six months. Is that correct?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes, and we have been trialling those arrangements since last July with some success. Obviously we have been trialling them with small numbers but we have achieved the targets set out in the new legislation, on that trial basis.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: That is on a trial basis and obviously only a percentage of applicants.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: How realistic is it to go from an average of 24 months down to six months by June of this year?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We have been doing a lot of preparation for that and Mr. O'Sullivan will outline our preparation.

Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan: There is a couple of different stands in that pack. There is the border procedure, which is what people talk about the most and that is a very fast process that requires us to do end-to-end in 12 weeks. There is an accelerated procedure, which is three months for a first instance and three months for appeal. Then there is the ordinary procedure, as it is called, and that is six months. They are ambitious targets but there are different levels.

We are currently achieving that for the very fast element, that is, the accelerated border procedure. We are putting resources in and investing heavily in new processes to aim to achieve those targets.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I am not doubting the Department's ability to respond but it seems a monumental task to go from 24 months to six months. If we have the Department officials back here in the autumn, are they confident that they will have achieved a six-month turnaround time for international protection applicants?

Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan: Clearly, one of the other important bearings on that is how many new applications are coming in.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Let us say we have similar numbers.

Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan: If there are similar numbers, then we aim to achieve those targets, particularly for the accelerated priority. The priority is the cases, which have a very low ground rate that we want to process very quickly.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: What percentage of the overall will be the accelerated category?

Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan: At the moment we are doing about 15% of all cases through that.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is Mr. O'Sullivan saying we may not achieve the six months target for the remaining 85%?

Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan: No, I am not saying that, Deputy. We are saying that the priority is to get the accelerated cases because that is where the sharpest timelines are and we are working very hard towards that. Clearly, we are going to do everything we can to achieve those targets and are putting significant resources into it.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There is a range of measures being taken and resources being put in place both from an IT and a human point of view. We have a team in Citywest who are doing a lot of work on this.

Mr. Doncha O'Sullivan: There is a substantial team devoted to that, yes.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is a really big project.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: With respect, the answers focus heavily on the accelerated side of things but that is only 15% of applicants. I am still not convinced that we will get anywhere near the six months target by June of this year in terms of the overall quantum of applications. Please convince me otherwise.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I do not want to overstate the intent obviously. I would say it will be bumpy. We have anticipated that it will be bumpy. I was in Brussels last month where we talked to the Commission about this and other member states are in the same kind of territory. A lot of people are doing an awful lot of work to prepare for it and the intentions is absolutely to achieve the target.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It begs the question that if we can go from 24 months to six months then why did we not significantly reduce the turnaround up to now?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: In the last few years there has been a huge amount of investment in acceleration, processing, IT and all of that. Mr. Dixon leads this piece of work. The amount of acceleration in turnaround times has been very considerable.

Mr. Richard Dixon: The critical aspect of this is that we are dealing with a significant backlog at the moment. When somebody comes in, he or she must wait for his or her interview, and next must wait for that to be considered and for the case to be written up. Under the pact timelines, on 12 June the numbers in the pact operation reset to zero. The people who come in on the first day will be managed that first day.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I understand.

Mr. Richard Dixon: So there is not a queue of people ahead of them. That is what gives us confidence that we will be able to hit the targets.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I hope Mr. Dixon is right but I have concerns. On the budget, and I asked earlier about it being a similar amount to 2025. If the Department significantly reduces the processing time, surely that will reduce the budget but the Department's budget is similar to 2024 and it does not add up.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Some of that is because we have these contracts in place for a couple of years. As we move through those, the cost of that will reduce. Is that fair of me to say, Mr. Delaney?

Mr. David Delaney: I think so. I wish to make one further point on that concerns the six-month target. The pact will implement in June 2026. If the six-month timeline is going to kick in, it is still the end of the year so we will still need to accommodate similar levels for the total of 2026 and, hopefully, when the pact implementation works-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is Mr. Delaney saying the financial benefits will be from 2027 onwards?

Mr. David Delaney: Obviously, it is based on variables outside our control, such as the numbers that could be coming into the State in the middle of that as well, but we think the logical progression will be that in six months, at the end of the second half of this year, people will hopefully be processed faster, but they will similarly be accommodated for that spell. Benefits will hopefully accrue in subsequent years.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We got some reassurance from the Commission as well. It is quite happy with the progress we are making and the plans we have in place, so hopefully it will go well.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the witnesses.

Deputy Grace Boland: The witnesses are all very welcome. I am going to begin by being a bit parochial. I represent north County Dublin and Dublin Fingal West. We have had a really chronic lack of women's refuges in north County Dublin. Fingal is the third most populated county in the country. Balbriggan is the youngest large town. It is also the most culturally diverse town. Balbriggan, Skerries, Rush, Lusk and other towns are expanding rapidly. There are plans to deliver a women's refuge in north County Dublin. Can the witnesses give me an update as to the status of that, please?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will have to get back to the Deputy after the break on the north County Dublin aspect if that is okay.

Deputy Grace Boland: I would appreciate that. It is nearly there, and it is very much needed.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I appreciate that.

Deputy Grace Boland: The Department very helpfully wrote to the committee and provided a table in relation to ICT projects. I want to go through a few of them. One that is mentioned is the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, now Fiosrú, case management system. The original approved budget was €4.395 million. The spend to the end of 2025 was over €2 million. The original table the Department provided states that this contract was terminated in late 2024. The updated table states that it was terminated in August 2025. The witnesses might give me an understanding of what this project involves. Was there a complete waste of €2 million?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will ask Mr. Ward to come in on that.

Mr. Neil Ward: Maybe I will walk through the timeline first if that is helpful.

Deputy Grace Boland: Briefly, if Mr. Ward does not mind.

Mr. Neil Ward: Of course. As I mentioned, the original business case for this was submitted in May 2022. It should be stated that GSOC has an old case management system. It is not great. It was obviously transitioning to become Fiosrú under the new Act and wanted a new system. We thought there was value in that. We approved its final business case on 23 August 2022. As part of that, it was required to set up an external peer review group that would review every stage of the contract. It then got some external-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Does Mr. Ward mean external private entities?

Mr. Neil Ward: No.

Deputy Grace Boland: Peers.

Mr. Neil Ward: This is a requirement for all projects over €2 million. We set up an external peer review group. It is made up of three or four individuals.

Deputy Grace Boland: In Mr. Ward's Department.

Mr. Neil Ward: No, from outside our Department, but who have expertise in IT projects.

Deputy Grace Boland: Who assigns those people?

Mr. Neil Ward: On the Fiosrú one, I would have to come back to the Deputy, but they-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Is there a process for assignment? How does it work?

Mr. Neil Ward: We look for people with expertise.

Deputy Grace Boland: Who takes ownership? Is it the Office of Government Procurement or the chief information officer? Who decides who is on these external peer review groups?

Mr. Neil Ward: Under the Department of public expenditure circular, it depends on the scale of the project. If the project is estimated at a value of in excess of €5 million, the digital

government oversight unit in the Department of Public Expenditure Infrastructure Public Service Reform and Digitalisation takes responsibility for setting it up. If the project is estimated to have a value of over €2 million then the Department is responsible for setting it up.

Deputy Grace Boland: So, the Department goes and finds the external peer review group.

Mr. Neil Ward: Our project management office finds people.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The responsibility does not shift. The responsibility stays with the agency and the Department. It is that they advise on whether things are going well or whether we are achieving best practice.

Deputy Grace Boland: There are plenty of instances like it.

Mr. Neil Ward: They have a number of contracts to deliver the project. There are companies doing business analysis and that sort of work.

Deputy Grace Boland: What went wrong on this particular project?

Mr. Neil Ward: It awarded a contract for the project delivery aspect, namely the real core of building the new system, to a company called Codec. That was awarded in February 2024. It is fair to say that it did not go well from the start.

Deputy Grace Boland: Why was that?

Mr. Neil Ward: Codec's view was that GSOC was not really ready to support the project to the degree that it felt was necessary. It also felt that GSOC's resources were tied up in preparing for the transition to Fiosrú and that it did not have as much subject matter expertise available as Codec felt was necessary. GSOC-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Why did the external peer review group not pick this up?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It did.

Mr. Neil Ward: It did, so-----

Deputy Grace Boland: At the outset.

Mr. Neil Ward: It raised concerns right at the start when the contract was being awarded about GSOC's level of readiness for it. In quarter 3 of 2024, it recommended that the project not progress with Codec. In September 2024, Codec stood down its team and there was a dialogue between Codec and GSOC, or Fiosrú, for a couple of months after that. It did come forward with a revised business case suggesting a very substantial increase to the overall project budget. That was not approved. We did not approve that. Following that, GSOC terminated the contract with Codec.

Deputy Grace Boland: Has the €2 million been wasted-----

Mr. Neil Ward: No.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No.

Deputy Grace Boland: -----or is there anything that we can use?

Mr. Neil Ward: I mentioned that there are a number of providers. The expenditure to the end of 2025 is €2.2 million. Of that-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It is €2.2 million?

Mr. Neil Ward: Yes. The figures we have provided-----

Deputy Grace Boland: The total-----

Mr. Neil Ward: The figures we provided to the committee-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I have a figure of €2.079 million.

Mr. Neil Ward: They were the figures to the end of September, which was what the committee had requested from us.

Deputy Grace Boland: Okay.

Mr. Neil Ward: At the end of the year, the amount involved was €2.235 million. Of that, €525,904 was paid to Codec. That was a contractual requirement. The way the contract was-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It was just over €525,000.

Mr. Neil Ward: Yes. The way the contract was structured was that there were a number of costs involved. Part of that was the implementation cost. The contract required that 20% of that cost would be paid on day one. Codec had a certain upfront payment built in to the contract. It received that, and it received nothing else after that.

Deputy Grace Boland: How can we say that it has not been wasted? Where are we at?

Mr. Neil Ward: Separate from Codec, there are also other companies involved in the project.

Deputy Grace Boland: What are they doing?

Mr. Neil Ward: They have been doing a lot of requirements gathering work and process mapping. They have been re-examining the processes that are involved, and-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is business analysis, essentially.

Mr. Neil Ward: It is business analysis, and system design at a high level.

Deputy Grace Boland: That is since 2022. As processes change over time, would that not have to be redone if this project is reignited?

Mr. Neil Ward: No. These teams have been on the ground since 2024. We have Ernst and Young-----

Deputy Grace Boland: The project was set up in 2022, but the work only started in-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No, it was proposed in 2022.

Mr. Neil Ward: It was proposed.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The contract was awarded in February 2024-----

Mr. Neil Ward: Correct.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: -----and, essentially, from September 2024, it was in the process of examining whether it could continue or not.

Deputy Grace Boland: Ms McPhillips thinks this analysis work can still be used, and that only €500,000 was wasted.

Mr. Neil Ward: Yes.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is an interesting case study in the governance working-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It is, yes.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: -----because of the governance in terms of controlling the project and making sure it did not go beyond its scope worked. The fail faster theory that we hear a lot about in the area of IT did work in this case. It was brought to a head before it could go on.

Deputy Grace Boland: I appreciate that, but the Secretary General might look at the Forensic Science Ireland, FSI, DNA application project. The original business case greatly underestimated the complexity of the project and the resources required to deliver on requirements. That is similar to what Ms McPhillips is saying with GSOC. It did not have the time, and it did not have the subject matter expertise to develop to it.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is quite a different kind of project. It became a different project in the course of it - successfully, I think.

Mr. Neil Ward: Yes. I would not put them in the same category at all. The FSI project has delivered very successfully. It has been ISO accredited and is very highly internationally regarded. What happened with the FSI project was that the scope of the original project-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It had nearly four times the budget.

Mr. Neil Ward: The scope of the original project was to replace a complicated Excel - it was an Excel, however - with a better platform. It submitted change requests that were really rigorously analysed at each stage of this. What it ended up delivering was a system that is entirely integrated with the lab equipment in Forensic Science Ireland. It is something that is completely different.

Deputy Grace Boland: Why was that not anticipated at the outset?

Mr. Neil Ward: The scope changed. When the scope changed-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I appreciate that it now has good technology, but that could easily have gone the other way. We have seen it with other IT projects. If you do not know what you are contracting for, do not have an in-depth understanding of what is involved and do not have clear project timelines and deliverables, a project can spiral out of control.

Mr. Neil Ward: We have-----

Deputy Grace Boland: We have already-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That is where the governance works, so-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I know, but on the governance on the other project, that is €500,000 wasted for the taxpayer.

Mr. Neil Ward: There also was not dedicated procurement in the FSI one. We were drawing down resources for frameworks we already have in place. We were not going to the market for an FSI project. We went to the market for resources that we could use flexibly and across different projects.

Deputy Grace Boland: It was a contractor, or external contractors.

Mr. Neil Ward: Yes.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The Deputy's point is a good one if she is talking about a very settled, established agency or Department that has sufficient expertise to do the analysis upfront. FSI was operating in very poor conditions in a building it had been in since the 1970s. When it originally envisaged the project, it simply did not have the capacity to foresee what it would be capable of in the new laboratory. This was realised over the course of the project. The governance and the permissions granted along the way-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Can I ask about the supplier payment issues? There were ten. There were five instances of an incorrect supplier being paid and four instances of duplicate payments. There was also an incident where an invoice was overpaid. What steps have been taken to make sure this will never happen again? Can Ms McPhillips tell us we are not going to see the same mistakes repeated in 2025?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The sums have all been recouped.

Deputy Grace Boland: Which is good, but there is no guarantee there will not be a recurrence.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We have recovered the payments and we have implemented stronger internal review processes to make sure there can be no reoccurrence.

Deputy Grace Boland: So, we will not see it in the 2025 accounts.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No.

An Cathaoirleach: The Deputy has assurances.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Just to start and to get a broad overview, could the witnesses give me the numbers for the capacity in the system for Ukrainian refugees and international protection applicants, separating out ARP accommodation? Apart from the latter, what is the total capacity in the system?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will ask Mr. Rowley to come in on that, if that is okay.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Sure. There are 20,000 in State-contracted accommodation that also comprises the rapid builds. That excludes the ARP capacity, which is 42,000. That is where we are at with accommodation for Ukrainians at the moment.

Deputy Paul Murphy: And international protection?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Thirty-three thousand.

Deputy Paul Murphy: On top of that capacity?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes.

Deputy Paul Murphy: That is 53,000 in total. How many people are in there currently?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There are 33,000 or so in IPAS. Sorry, but am I saying that wrong?

Mr. David Delaney: There are 33,000 people residing in international protection accommodation at the moment and a further 2,500 available beds. We are talking about 35,600 or 35,700 in total. That would be available capacity and people residing in-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: So there are 2,500 empty beds in IPAS. How many empty beds are there in Ukrainian accommodation minus ARP accommodation, which would be very complicated to calculate?

Mr. David Delaney: About 2,000 empty beds.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Therefore, there are approximately 4,000 empty beds in total in the system, comprising 2,500 in IPAS and 2,000 in accommodation for Ukrainians.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: While we have empty beds in IPAS, they are not usable beds. I think Mr. Delaney will agree that is fair to say. Some of the beds are in the course of refurbishment. At any given time, a percentage is out of commission. Other beds that are not usable may be spare beds in rooms. If there is a family of three in a room, there may be an additional bed, a fourth, but it cannot be utilised for another person. Is that fair to say?

Mr. David Delaney: That is fair to say. In addition to the figures given, we have 1,100 to 1,200 people claiming international protection each month. We still have to have some sort of capacity to deal with people coming in and also a little flexibility in terms of surge capacity. To be totally frank, we would prefer to have more than 2,500 available beds at the moment. Of those, only about 250 to 280 are available for single males. In the context of capacity management and risk management, we would prefer to have a few more.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Of the 4,500 empty beds, how many are usable and how many do not fall into the category of the fourth bed in a room with a family of three? Clearly, it would be inappropriate to put someone in such a bed.

Mr. David Delaney: Most of the 2,500 on the IP side would be usable.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Most of those are usable. Could I have a rough figure? Is it 1,500?

Mr. David Delaney: No. Most of them. It would be closer to-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Over 2,000 usable beds in IPAS. What about the accommodation for Ukrainians?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Two thousand.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Two thousand. So, we have 4,000 usable vacant beds today. In that case, why are there over 500 men sleeping rough on the streets?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Obviously, that is a situation we are not happy with at all. We have people arriving every day and we have to do vulnerability assessments on them and retain a certain number of beds in order to be able to respond to that. Mr. Delaney might expand on that.

Mr. David Delaney: We are dealing with humans. I do not want to minimise that factor at all. As the Secretary General pointed out, the situation is not one we are happy about. If we were to make an offer of accommodation to the 500-odd males awaiting an offer and all of them accepted, we would not be able to give them all a bed. We have only about 280 beds available for single males. Straight off, we would not be able to fulfil the need. On top of that, in a typical week a further 110 to 120 single male applicants apply for international protection. Even if we offered a bed to the 500 men awaiting an offer and 280 accepted, we would not be able to offer accommodation to any single male the very next day.

We have vulnerability triage on the day single males apply for international protection. If somebody is deemed to be so vulnerable that he needs a bed on the day, we will give it to them if available. If we were to offer all of the limited number of beds we had available to all the single males waiting, we would not even be able to do the vulnerability triage in a humane way.

Deputy Paul Murphy: To go back to the figures, Mr. Delaney is stating that most of the 2,500 beds are available but that only about 280 of those are available for single men. Are the others all in family units or in units for women?

Mr. David Delaney: Families, couples, single women, and a mix of those.

Deputy Paul Murphy: With regard to the 2,000 beds for Ukrainians, what is the gender or family mix or breakdown?

Mr. David Delaney: It translates into about 640 rooms. I cannot give the exact configuration. We had a 90-day policy in place that has been changed to a 30-day policy, but we do accept exemptions. If somebody with a medical need comes into the State and is looking for 30-day accommodation, we need to accommodate them. We need a buffer in that regard. I said we have 2,000 beds, which means a 10% buffer. In the next six weeks, we will get that down to 7%. The difference between Ukrainian protection and international protection is the far more temporary nature. The conditions attached to IP are far more detailed and onerous. We are driving things down.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: To add to that, a fair bit of work was done on this over the course of 2025. We started off in March of last year with 3,500 people homeless. It is still 500, which is a huge number, but it is down from 3,500 at the beginning of the year.

We are under some pressure in relation to single-male accommodation, as Mr. Delaney has said. For example, we had accommodation at the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum that is not available to us at the moment because the LDA has moved on that site. We keep this under review on a daily basis and really do put a lot of effort into trying to accommodate people, but it is about maintaining a balance.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Are there more or fewer single male IPAS beds in the system now than a year ago, or is the number the same?

Mr. David Delaney: I could not be sure. The number is probably a little lower because, between developments at the Central Mental Hospital and some other locations, we have had a shrinkage of availability. Some of that we knew was coming down the line, so, as the Secretary General has pointed out, we tried to sensibly manage the portfolio in that dynamic and not put ourselves into a crisis when the Central Mental Hospital beds went out of the system. We tried to manage it knowing that.

We do an analysis every week, asking whether there are beds in the system, whether for single males, families or couples, that we feel may be in jeopardy. Contracts may not be renewed. We do inspections and may have concerns. We are always analysing and profiling.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Currently, 534 people who have fled here seeking asylum are homeless, which is a breach of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Why are we not using the 280 or so beds made for single men, particularly as these individuals are single males? Why are we not just putting them into the beds as opposed to putting them on the streets? Why are we not reallocating some of the accommodation? I do not fully understand the Chinese wall between the accommodation for Ukrainians and IPAS accommodation. Could family or other rooms be repurposed? We have capacity, so why are there people on the streets? There are two parts to my question. The first relates to the 280 available beds, which is the simplest aspect, and the second relates to repurposing, which I accept would take a bit of work.

Mr. David Delaney: That is okay. Maybe I will give a little detail on what we also do in the system. I spoke about the vulnerability triage on the day people arrive. We also have partnerships with NGOs in Dublin that provide day services, food and the capacity to wash and do laundry. We also have a partnership with an NGO service that does seven-day outreach services in the evenings and at night to identify rough sleepers. We take this very seriously. The weekly expense allowance, which is €39, is paid, but on top of that we pay a further €75 to asylum seekers awaiting an offer of accommodation. If there a lot in the system in terms of reception condition offers-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: It is not Mr. Delaney's fault, but giving people €100 a week and a tent to sleep on the streets does not represent a lot in the system. These people are who are fleeing here.

Mr. David Delaney: I am giving the Deputy clarity on what we are doing. As I have said previously, if we were to offer beds to all 500 males awaiting an offer of accommodation, we would not be able to do so. We only have 280.

On top of that, we know there are certain centres within the system for single males that might be unlikely to remain in the system, whether they want to exit themselves or whether we have concerns, so we need to maintain a small buffer for that reason as well. As I said, between people who would be identified under vulnerability triage or identified as vulnerable through the outreach service, we need beds for those people as well. Quite frankly, 280 beds is very much on the line. I think that explains that aspect of the Deputy's question.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Okay.

Mr. David Delaney: On Deputy Murphy's second question about reallocation, we have done that. Part of the reason we have been able to reduce the number from 3,500 to 500, even with certain centres exiting the system, has been pivoting the system like that. That has worked to a certain extent. As part of contracts with a lot of providers, it is specified that it is for families, couples or a mix. We are not in a position to amend those contracts or providers are not in a position where they want to amend it, so our hands are somewhat tied in scenarios like that as well. It is not a thing that we have not done it - we have - but we have reached a point where we do not have as much flexibility within the system to do it much further.

Deputy Paul Murphy: These are people who have potentially gone through horrendous trauma. They may have seen family members killed and fled horrific situations and are now sleeping on the streets. Does the Department keep data on where these people are and does it keep data on assaults on homeless asylum seekers?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Obviously, we keep in touch with the Garda. I do not think all 500 are on the street. Some are couch surfing and so forth. I am not saying that is a great solution either but, manifestly, they are not all on the streets.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Ms McPhillips does not know?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I live in the city-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: No, that is not what I am saying and it is not a criticism, but the Department does not know. Is that true? It does not whether are people are sleeping rough?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There is outreach through the NGOs we contract to monitor rough sleepers. There are a small number of rough sleepers - too many - but at the same time, it is a small number. We take an interest in that and keep in touch with the Garda. The safety of people is our paramount concern.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Is that small number 300? Is it 200?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I could not put a number on it but, manifestly, at times, they are not all homeless and sleeping rough.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Maybe, but the Department does not know. It seems strange to me. In terms of keeping data on attacks on asylum seekers whom the Department has put onto streets - in line with Government policy; it is not Ms McPhillips' personal responsibility - does the Department keep figures on that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We do not have data but the Garda definitely pays close attention to the safety of people who are sleeping rough.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank Ms McPhillips.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The Garda maintains hate crime data as well, so that is a factor.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I want to change course and topic slightly and have a look at the awarding of contracts for the provision of asylum seeker accommodation. I know the Government has admitted it does not check with the Garda to ensure these providers do not have a criminal record. That is fair enough. A system was introduced last year which means accommodation providers must supply a personal declaration to say they are tax compliant and do not have a criminal record, if I am right. I believe when the Department was questioned on this by the *Sunday Independent*, it confirmed these declarations are not verified with An Garda Síochána. I would like to tease this out a little bit. First, why not? Second, is the Department aware of criminals actively bidding for these contracts from the Department?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will take the second question first and say no. At the same time, I will ask Mr. Delaney to come on in on the detail of this. The due diligence we do is the same diligence that is done across the State in relation to placing contracts.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I do not dispute that.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Generally, it is not less than that.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I am just trying to tease out where there may be areas we need to suggest might need to be strengthened. I want clarity on the process is at the moment and what checks and balances are in place.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will ask Mr. Delaney to go through that.

Mr. David Delaney: I thank the Deputy. Our due diligence process reflects the public procurement guidelines from 2023 that would have been issued by the Office of Government Procurement. In terms of that self-declaration, that would be a reflection of standards required by an individual or company contracting with the State. We require the self-declaration to be notarised as well, so there is a further legal undertaking that a provider or person must give by doing that.

It would not be normal across the system to carry out Garda checks then. That would be an accepted standard in most instances. Even if companies are domiciled elsewhere, we require they must be registered in Ireland with the Companies Registration Office. Obviously, there is a requirement around directors to reach standards to be able to do that. We check properties with Tailte Éireann. We also get confirmation that no foreign financial contributions have been involved in the setting up of the business or the development of the property. We also require a tax clearance cert as part of the contract.

Generally, we pay monthly on foot of invoices received. We check those invoices but every single invoice has to have a valid and up to date tax clearance cert. It cannot be a case of we sent one in a few months ago and that is fine. Every single month, a valid, brand new one has to be issued, if it is coming up to its expiry date. We also do pre-occupancy inspections and have boots on the ground whenever we get a new property. As we have an inspection regime that has made over 400 inspections in 2025, any contract that is up for renewal will have had a relatively recently inspection. We will have seen the property. Staff will have met with the managers. We will know exactly what we are dealing with.

I think that gives the Deputy a broad perspective on how we go about doing this.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: It does. The reason I am asking this is because the dogs on the street know some of these people who are operating some of these centres are criminals. There is a perception that some of the money that is funding this is the proceeds of crime. The way around that is perhaps to have family members or relatives front the company that is applying for the tender. This has been raised with the Minister. I am not just raising that here.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will just clarify something for the Deputy. The money that is funding this is public money, so it is not the proceeds of crime.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: No, I know that. I mean the funding of setting up the centre, kitting it out and putting themselves in a position where they are able to apply for the contract. I do not mean the funding and I appreciate the clarification on that. There is probably a broader need for a cross-agency approach with CAB, in my view, so that there are spotters for this. There are some people the Department and the Minister are aware of and I understand contracts have been revoked as a result of information on this.

On the back of that, what immediate steps are being taken to now ensure none of these contracts are awarded to these types of characters, going forward? Is there dialogue ongoing with CAB about that to spot these at the outset so we are not put in the position later on that we have to revoke contracts?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Just on the general point with CAB, whatever the nature of the crime is, CAB does not exclude anyone from its investigations. If people are involved in crime, CAB will target them. CAB has neighbourhood profilers in each Garda division and they get a lot of local information through that network. It has actually proved really useful for CAB over the past few years. There is no nature of business or activity in the State that is except from that and this would fall into that if that is the case as well. That is an option that is open to people and open to CAB as well.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I appreciate that but with regard to dialogue with the Department of justice about these characters availing of contracts to provide asylum accommodation, is there dialogue about that, whether it be CAB's intelligence coming to the Department or the Department having concerns and approaching CAB? Is there any kind of cross-agency communication in that regard?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will not comment on intelligence but the process of placing a contract is very much a legal process. Mr. Delaney might go into that. The notarised declaration that we require people to complete from 2025 onwards deals with a lot of risks in relation to that.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: On the inspections and monthly invoicing and all of that, are steps taken to mitigate those risks?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Okay. I appreciate that.

I will move on to non-compliant procurement. The high value of non-compliant procurement reported by the Vote of the then Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in the past few years related mainly to contracts entered into for the provision of international protection accommodation services. In 2021, its non-compliant procurement was over €90 million, and that related to the provision of international protection accommodation. I do not believe the Ukraine war was under way at that stage. In 2022, the figure rose to €111 million, in 2023, it was €84 million, and in 2024, it was €52 million. All of this relates to the provision of international protection accommodation services.

The Department's own non-compliant procurement figure for 2024 was actually only €5 million, which was significantly less. I acknowledge that before we go any further. Where I am going with this is that now the Department has taken over the international protection accommodation services, IPAS, obviously the Department is committed to ensuring that it will fully comply with procurement rules and the Department does not see itself in that position and the Irish taxpayer does not see the Department in that position. But does the Department have a figure for 2025? I know they are not published yet so perhaps there is an estimate as I am curious to see if the amount has risen from the €5 million. I sincerely hope it is nowhere near the previous Department's figures in this regard.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I feel like I did see it but I just do not have it in front of me for the 2025 figure, and we obviously have not completed the return yet. It is due at the end of next month. I feel like it is lower but let me come back to the Deputy on that.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I presume there was engagement with the Office of Government Procurement ahead of the IPAS transition from that Department to the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration to ensure that safety nets were in place.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Not with the Office of Government Procurement but we have our own procurement function in the Department and a principal officer leading that who has great expertise. He used to work in the OGP. Creating that resource has brought a great deal of rigour to our own procurement processes over the last few years. Hopefully we will continue to do that.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Listening to the witnesses answering my colleagues before they come to me I have every confidence they were aware of the risks and they are trying to put the step measures in place. I would, however, be curious to see that figure if Ms McPhillips could provide it just to see. If a Department seems to be prudent, is aware of the risks and is putting measures in place but the figures rise dramatically, then there is a bigger problem that is not necessarily down to the Department.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: As I have said before at the committee, the circumstances of 2022 and 2023 for the Department of children were not such that anybody could do procurement in any kind of lengthy or very protracted way. It was just not an option for them at the time and they did what they had to do. Since 2024 onwards a huge amount of work has gone into the governance, both when they were in the Department of children and since they have come over, in order to regularise that and make sure that the processes are as tight as they can be. People did what they absolutely had to do in the interests of the State at the time.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I wish to pick up on something from earlier when Deputy McAuliffe was asking Mr. Delaney about the cost per head and so on. The figures showed that the State spent €1.2 billion last year on asylum accommodation. This was almost double the expenditure of 2023. I think it works out at an average daily spend of €3 million a day for the 33,000 international protection applicants. There are nearly 10,000 children in that. I note that it was said that reports and figures are not lining up. Mr. Delaney mentioned the dialogue he was having with his counterparts in other European countries at his level. From that, is Mr. Delaney able to tell us today how our spend compares with our EU neighbours?

Mr. David Delaney: I do not have figures like that to hand so I would not like to comment. I think Ireland is definitely in a different sort of cycle. Talking to European colleagues, they said that the Syrian crisis around 2015 was a moment of big numbers coming into their states. They had to adapt quickly and come up with solutions. They were probably experiencing what we experienced from 2022 on. We did not have much of an influx into Ireland when the Syrian crisis hit and when people were moving across Europe. Ironically, when I was talking about experiences of the last three or four years, they said that they would have come across that ten years ago-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: In 2015 or 2017 in Europe.

Mr. David Delaney: While I do not have those figures to hand, we can look at that and see what we have. Some of it is obviously in the general public domain as well.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Deputy Byrne. We will now take a short break.

Sitting suspended at 12.06 p.m. and resumed at 12.21 p.m.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Thanks to all the witnesses for coming back again. I might just start on the rough sleeping issue that Ms McPhillips was probed a bit about earlier. The Department does not have data on the number of international protection applicants who are rough sleeping in Dublin on any given night. Is that correct?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That is right.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is Ms McPhillips aware that for over a decade the Dublin Simon Community has carried out rough sleeping outreach counts for homeless people who are not international protection applicants? Ms McPhillips mentioned that outreach providers are contracted solely to deal with international protection applicants. Who are those providers?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will ask Mr. Delaney to answer if that is okay.

Mr. David Delaney: One provider assisting us in this is Tiglin whose workers go out seven nights per week. While we do not have a sense of the numbers of rough sleepers at any given moment in time, they are out there on the ground interacting with people, getting their details, feeding them back to us and when we have accommodation available, we are able to make offers. We think we have a fairly good system in place to identify people.

Deputy James Geoghegan: What kind of data does Tiglin provide to the Department from this nightly activity and does it retain any data?

Mr. David Delaney: I will have to get back to the Deputy on that. They generally get the residence card number to confirm they are an international protection applicant and I assume the name. I will check whatever else is-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Who does Tiglin give that information to?

Mr. David Delaney: A team in IPAS receives the information.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Who represents IPAS? Is that Mr. Delaney, but he does not know whether this information is being provided?

Mr. David Delaney: It is being provided.

Deputy James Geoghegan: He has never seen it. Is that correct?

Mr. David Delaney: No. I would get reports-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Why is that?

Mr. David Delaney: -----but I do not necessarily see the-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: What does it say in the reports Mr. Delaney gets from Tiglin?

Mr. David Delaney: To be clear Deputy, I would not necessarily be involved in the communication between Tiglin and the team dealing with this who would report it to me.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Who receives the reports from Tiglin if it is not Mr. Delaney. Is it somebody below him? Then, what does that person do with those reports?

Mr. David Delaney: They would then go through the report and see what available accommodation is in the system and they would refer it for action.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Mr. Delaney has never seen those reports. Is that correct?

Mr. David Delaney: I would get a consolidated report then of details. I do not know how much those details would be taken from our system or information from-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Ms McPhillips said we have no data of rough sleepers who are international protection applicants.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I am not aware of it, Deputy. I suppose it is possible that somebody has it but I am not aware of it

Mr. David Delaney: To be clear, we have an NGO out doing this. I could not in any confidence say that they are interacting with every rough sleeper.

Deputy James Geoghegan: For over a decade, the Dublin Simon Community has been carrying out rough sleeping assessments of the figures for homeless people. Those are the figures that are published and the DRHE relies on those figures. Mr. Delaney is saying that the Department is paying Tiglin. How much does it pay Tiglin to carry out the surveys?

Mr. David Delaney: I do not have those details in front of me.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Mr. Delaney might come back to the committee in respect of that. There is an outreach service for the people who are rough sleeping, but Mr. Delaney has never seen any of the reports that Tiglin do about the people who are rough sleeping. Is that correct?

Mr. David Delaney: I have seen a summary and a consolidation of the reports.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Okay, and what is in the summary and the consolidation of the reports?

Mr. David Delaney: It would be details of the applicant's name, date of birth and confirmation of the temporary residence number, that type of thing.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Does it have the date of the night the person was seen?

Mr. David Delaney: Yes, it would confirm when the outreach service would have interacted with an asylum seeker.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Extracted from those reports, surely it is possible to decipher a figure, on a given week, of how many people who are rough sleeping are international protection applicants.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We can have a look at it and see what is discernible. In my own defence, we have this since last May, so I am not aware of all the detail across the system. Mr. Delaney's team may well have this detail and we get it for the Deputy if we have it.

Mr. David Delaney: Just to manage expectations, because someone was a rough sleeper on a Monday does not mean they remained rough sleeping. They may have got an offer from IPAS, which means they are no longer a rough sleeper. That is why we could not in confidence say we have a definitive figure but we can confidently say we have a service working on it.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Surely somebody can extract the information from the reports? Does Tiglin report on a daily, weekly or monthly basis? What is the reporting requirement?

Mr. David Delaney: It is generally daily.

Deputy James Geoghegan: So somebody can carry out an assessment of a trend over the past six months. Ms. McPhillips might do that.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We will get that to the Deputy.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I would appreciate if Ms McPhillips could provide those trends. I ask this question for a very specific purpose. Ms McPhillips has stated that we have got the figure down of people presenting from 3,500 to 500. Why has the Department rested on its laurels with that figure of 500? Are we done now?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No, it was lower at one point. It was down in the 400s at some stage last year and it has come back up again a bit, so we are not resting our laurels at all. We are trying to drive that number down as much as we can, but having regard to the need to keep some capacity in the system, as Mr. Delaney was saying earlier.

Deputy James Geoghegan: What are the trade-offs? Quite rightly, Ms. McPhillips said that it is not the case that all these people are rough sleeping. If they were, we would know about it. A lot of them, if not the vast majority of them, are probably couch surfing with friends but a huge number are still rough sleeping. Should we not be trying to eliminate rough sleeping? How do we do that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is very difficult. We are trying to maximise the amount of alternative accommodation that we have without creating more cost in the system. Mr. Delaney has teams working on that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: The challenge with the continuation of any level of rough sleeping is first of all they are adjacent to just one area because they are near Mount Street, where they have to submit their applications. They can only find certain locations, which are sometimes parks or near playgrounds or sometimes near schools. In managing homelessness, the DRHE does everything humanly possible to avoid people rough sleeping. It contracts outreach people all of the time. The circumstances in which you would find a homeless person in a tent in Dublin City who is not an international protection applicant are extremely different to an international protection applicant who might be sleeping in a tent. More often than not - I presume close to 100% of the time - the international protection applicant who is in a tent on the streets of Dublin wants to be, and would be if given the opportunity, in an international protection accommodation service. Why can we not get to that place? Is it related to pull and push factors? Is there any reason why we are allowing the continuation of any amount of rough sleeping of international protection applicants? I do not buy the resources argument because the Department could do this if it wanted to. It has proven that it has reduced the numbers dramatically. There was a massive change in approach after the build-up of international protection applicants in tents around Mount Street. That resulted in where we are now. Yet,

there is still an amount of rough sleeping that should not be happening. If the Department did not want it to happen it could do something about it. However, if the witnesses do not have the data in front of them, that is a challenge.

Mr. David Delaney: I am happy to address that, Deputy. I would point to the fact that there has been success in the last year, getting it down from 3,500 to 400 at one point.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It feels like they have stopped.

Mr. David Delaney: To clarify, we have not stopped. There definitely was an uptick in the numbers of applications for asylum in quarter 4 of 2025. We have seen the numbers still hitting between 1,100 and 1,200 per month now in 2026. In simple terms, the number applying has increased, which has put increased pressure on the system. In addition, as the Secretary General pointed out, in the Central Mental Hospital, significant hundreds of beds for single males came onto the system-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: You are well planned. You know the trends now and you have done a good job of managing where we are now. You can have a level of expectation. Does Mr. Delaney know the average duration of rough sleeping an international protection applicant might have before they enter accommodation? Is that information you guys have?

Mr. David Delaney: We will see if we can collate that, but ultimately that is a variable figure. As I said, someone might be rough sleeping and then might find out-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: It is variable, but there are lots of them, so there will be a pattern or a trend over a six- or nine-month period.

Mr. David Delaney: We can look at that, but I would qualify any information by pointing out there are different realities-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: You can only base the data on the people Tiglin has engaged with, and I acknowledge that, but at least you have a base from which to work. I encourage that be worked on because the elimination of international protection applicants rough sleeping on our streets should be a priority for the Department of justice.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is a priority. The CMH site was a significant safety valve for us for the past few years. It provided us with 400 beds, in tents admittedly, but it was a safe place for people to sleep and we used that to the maximum. We have lost that in recent weeks and it has had an impact. It is worth saying that we do not believe people are rough sleeping for long, but it obviously has an impact on them and the community around them.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It is not even the length. It is the fact of the continuation. It does not matter from the community's point of view whether it is the same person in the tent in an area. The continuation of persons in tents rough sleeping adjacent to the Mount Street office should not be permitted just because the Department has done a good job of reducing the larger numbers.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is definitely undesirable, but taking 400 beds out of the system in Dundrum has made a difference to us over the past few weeks. We need to-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: You knew that was coming. I am not being funny, but you knew that was coming.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I know, but it had gone on for a long time at the same time.

Mr. David Delaney: We had concerns it was coming, but it had been coming on numerous occasions over the past year or two. We were cautious but somewhat optimistic. We had to be careful, and we were careful. We were able to absorb the loss of those beds. However, to be frank, I believe it was awaiting a decision from An Coimisiún Pleanála or a High Court judgment - I am not sure which - and if that had gone a different way, we would still have the tents. There is flexibility in that. To take up the Deputy's point, we know the trends now. We are still very much in a dynamic where there could be an uptick or a downtick of between 20% and 30%. That is a very big change. We are still in what I would consider to be moving towards a stable environment, but in terms of trend analysis and the like, it is still an environment that can change quickly. I just give that perspective on it.

An Cathaoirleach: I have a number of questions. We had a previous engagement before Christmas and a number of us touched on the huge expenditure on IPAS. Some of my questions will relate to IPAS, but also to ARP and provision of Ukrainian accommodation. To say the figures are off the charts is an understatement, so it is only right that the public accounts committee get to scrutinise this and give it extensive hearings when we have over €2.2 billion being spent on provision of accommodation. I would say that some of that is in a chaotic manner, so much so that it led a fairly damning report being carried out by the C and AG last year focusing on IPAS. The witnesses might correct me if I am wrong, but some of those issues probably transcend into the provision of Ukrainian accommodation.

I start with ARP. Earlier, in response to Deputy Bennett, it was said that a perception was inferred that the ARP impacted on the private rental market, which was the basis for making the adjustments.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That was one of the factors.

An Cathaoirleach: It was one of the factors. Therefore, a perception led to a change in the rate being paid.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There was a policy decision about that. Is that fair, Mr. Rowley?

Mr. Conor Rowley: It is. That was one of the factors in terms of the potential impact on the labour market. From what we have seen, it possibly impacted on approximately 15%. It has a disproportionate impact in counties that have lower rents, such as Donegal.

An Cathaoirleach: You referred to a potential impact. What kind of process was there? Was a review carried out? What kind of an analysis was done?

Mr. Conor Rowley: The Department of housing looked at this. As a result, there is legislation going through the Houses at the moment to exclude properties registered with the RTB from accessing-----

An Cathaoirleach: A report was produced on foot of analysis.

Mr. Conor Rowley: There was internal-----

An Cathaoirleach: Was that shared with the Department of justice?

Mr. Conor Rowley: It was shared with us. There are different views on it. When it comes to the ARP, it has sometimes attracted a kind of captiousness in terms of its pros and cons. I will just say that it has unlocked a considerable amount of accommodation for people.

An Cathaoirleach: I will touch on that, but there are other concerns there. One of those concerns was the impact it would have on the private rental market where there were limited properties and this untaxed payment going to landlords for the provision of accommodation and the impact that would have in certain areas. I would not say they are areas where there are pockets of pressure zones. There are pressure zones across the State in the provision of private rental accommodation. That report commissioned and carried out by the Department of housing was shared with the Department of justice. May we be furnished with a copy of that report?

Mr. Conor Rowley: We can absolutely get that to the committee.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is the Department of housing's report though, so I think you would need to write to housing. I am not sure we have the whole thing.

Mr. Conor Rowley: I am not sure it is finalised yet, but once it is, we can liaise with colleagues on it. That was just one factor. The other factor was to bring payments in line with other member states where they were tapering supports for Ukrainians. That is important to note.

An Cathaoirleach: There were changes made in the provision or allocation of accommodation to Ukrainians. They moved from full and unrestricted access to accommodation. It then went down to 90 days and it is now 30 days. Are there still people availing of accommodation who have unrestricted provision of accommodation?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes, that is pre-March 2024.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes, we have approximately 17,500 people in that accommodation.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. Are there people under the 90-day rule?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: They are timing out. I would say they are nearly gone at this point because we are at more than 90 days since the November change.

An Cathaoirleach: The 30 day is obviously the remainder, bringing it up to 23,000. Is that correct?

Mr. Conor Rowley: I think there are approximately 17,500 in commercial accommodation. Maybe I was confusing it.

An Cathaoirleach: I am looking for a specific figure for those who have an unrestricted duration of time they can spend in contracted accommodation.

Mr. Conor Rowley: That figure is 17,500. Two policy levers are also important to note. There was the introduction of 90 days in March 2024 and, subsequently, the introduction of 30 days in November 2025. At the same time----

An Cathaoirleach: How many are impacted by the 30-day measure?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is roughly 500 people. I think that is the figure I saw in the past couple of days. I will come back with that.

An Cathaoirleach: What other changes are there for the 17,500 people? I know changes were made that people availing of accommodation would have to make a contribution towards accommodation.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That is in IPAS. Sorry, is it Ukraine as well?

Mr. Conor Rowley: There is no contribution model for the Ukraine system.

An Cathaoirleach: It is a bit strange that the Secretary General would not know.

Mr. Conor Rowley: It is important to note there is another important policy that was introduced in November. That precluded people from re-entering accommodation. Essentially, people got one offer of accommodation and one offer only.

An Cathaoirleach: Do any Ukrainians availing of accommodation make a contribution towards accommodation?

Mr. Conor Rowley: In the rapid-build development, there are 2,600 who pay.

An Cathaoirleach: They are in rapid build, so there are none in commercially provided.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No.

An Cathaoirleach: None. Okay. A figure was given about contracts that had been in place versus the number of commercial contracts in place now. I think the current figure given was approximately 500.

Mr. Conor Rowley: There are 560 currently in place.

An Cathaoirleach: That is down. At the height, there was-----

Mr. Conor Rowley: There were over 1,000. We had 448 contract terminations in the past two years.

An Cathaoirleach: On the basis on which those contracts were entered, some properties were repurposed to be available for Ukrainian accommodation. Am I right in saying that?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Yes, we had refurbishments, commercial accommodation, hotels, guest houses, complexes, etc.

An Cathaoirleach: What was the capital cost of carrying out some of that work, and where was that borne?

Mr. Conor Rowley: The capital costs for the refurbishments were €8.5 million, and that was run through the Department of housing.

An Cathaoirleach: That was across the board for refurbishments to bring property into use. Were there any contracts entered into where some of those costs might have been borne out in the contract over a two-year period? Were there any contracts entered into in that regard?

Mr. Conor Rowley: No, but in the refurbishment situation, we offered a longer contract to the six to three months we offer in commercial accommodation. That is because of the upfront costs people were entering into.

An Cathaoirleach: Were there any other funding streams through local authorities?

Mr. Conor Rowley: That was through the local authorities.

An Cathaoirleach: That €8.5 million was through local authorities. Of those, we got a figure earlier of approximately 2,000 beds currently unoccupied within the 560 contracts currently in place. Am I correct in saying that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is important to note we do not pay for them if they are not occupied. Is that fair, Mr. Rowley?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Everything is occupied at present, but we did in the past pay for things where there was no occupancy in there. We were holding certain accommodation for vulnerable cohorts and for moving people from high-cost hotels into certain areas, such as refurbished accommodation.

An Cathaoirleach: When did that change in policy happen, where you were paying for unoccupied beds?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It was near the beginning.

Mr. Conor Rowley: It was actually at the beginning. The committee has to remember the system was overwhelmed, but there was no system. The system had to be done in parallel and retrospectively.

An Cathaoirleach: That is the problem. There is no system anywhere, and that is one of the fundamental causes.

Mr. Conor Rowley: All the controls were retrospective.

An Cathaoirleach: I have a specific instance in Edenderry in County Offaly, where a former shoe factory was repurposed. It was announced by an ex-Minister that it was going to be used, with a two-year contract put in place. It was going to provide accommodation for 55 Ukrainians. This was back in 2024, and the works had been completed over several months. That has remained completely unoccupied for over two years and is still unoccupied. Would you have any information on that?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Is that in Clara in Offaly?

An Cathaoirleach: It is in Edenderry.

Mr. Conor Rowley: I do not, but I can definitely come back to you on it.

An Cathaoirleach: Would there be other examples like that? I assume you will provide clarity when you do come back as to where the funding came from, as was with the Department of housing repurposing this building. Are there any other examples of that, where premises were repurposed with funding drawn down for the works to be carried out, contracts entered and buildings then remaining unused and unoccupied for the full length?

Mr. Conor Rowley: There were for a time. We have been proactive, when we are relocating people, to minimise the cost in high-cost-----

An Cathaoirleach: Does proactive mean, when the two-year contract runs out, you proactively-----

Mr. Conor Rowley: No, sorry, the two-year contract may exist in refurbishments, but it does not exist in commercial. We have reduced all our contracts to three to six months, which allows us to renegotiate.

An Cathaoirleach: Are there any properties now under contract which are unused and have been unused since the contracts were entered into?

Mr. Conor Rowley: Not to my knowledge, but I will check that with the team and come back to the committee.

An Cathaoirleach: This is an absolute scandal for people in Offaly. People look at what they may perceive as inequities in the system, where there is no means test being carried out, people are getting payments, etc. Then, when they see a building like this repurposed and left vacant in the past two years in a county where there are over 130 people currently homeless, it is a scandal, particularly when State money went into refurbishing and repurposing this building. I would appreciate any information the witnesses might be able to provide on that.

I have other questions, but I will return to other members now and I will come back at that point. If it is acceptable to the committee, I will open up a second round of supplementary questions.

Deputy Joe Neville: This came up last time on this, but I just want to ask about the trends since October. We talked about the numbers coming in and where they were coming from. Are there many coming in from the UK? I think that was said. Is that still the trend of IPAS? Are we saying it is 13,000 to 15,000 per year?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It was 13,400 last year.

Deputy Joe Neville: What would it typically be, on average?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It was 13,400 last year, down from 18,000 the year before.

Deputy Joe Neville: How many of those are coming from the UK or Northern Ireland?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We measure it by how many claim asylum at the International Protection Office. It is between 80% and 90% on average in recent years who claim asylum at the International Protection Office. They do not seek asylum at the airport or Dublin Port; they come to Mount Street. That is our measure. Our assumption is they come from Northern Ireland.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is exactly what I was looking for. The assumption is they are coming on the bus from Northern Ireland. Is that correct?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Whatever means they come in, whether that is taxis, buses, trains or whatever.

Deputy Joe Neville: Would they have to say if they had been resident, or would they say they were not? What is their logic?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: They are generally reasonably straightforward on where they have come from. I will ask Mr. Dixon, chief international protection officer, to come in there.

Mr. Richard Dixon: As part of the registration process, they are asked the question of their route to the State and whether they have lived elsewhere in either another member state or in the UK. We do fingerprints at that point of registration, and those fingerprints are checked against a system called Eurodac, which tells us whether an individual has either applied for or received international protection elsewhere in a European Union member state. The Eurodac system obviously does not include the UK but, anecdotally, people tell us if they have formerly been in the UK and have moved here. They have either formerly been in the UK or elsewhere in Europe.

Deputy Joe Neville: Is there a concern with the threat of Reform coming into power in the UK and a tightening of laws that we will have a lot more people coming in that way? It is 90% of applicants now -13,000 - so we are essentially saying 10,000 or 11,000 probably came from the UK. Is that correct?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes, whatever it is of the 13,000.

Deputy Joe Neville: I just wanted to be clear.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Our experience over the past five or six years or more, maybe ten years, is that a lot of our asylum seekers come via the UK. Whether they have been resident in the UK or have simply transited the UK varies depending on what the policy in the UK is. Certainly, what they do in the UK impacts here, and that has been the experience.

Deputy Joe Neville: Would there be a feeling that if we want to have any element of control over our own immigration laws, essentially we will have to mirror the UK laws? Have the witnesses looked closely at any transition in UK immigration law and if the changes would be felt here immediately?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We work very closely with our Home Office colleagues. We stay in constant contact with them and have very good relationships at an operational level, strategic level and political level with the Home Office. I would not say we have mirrored all its policies over the years, but we certainly keep an eye on what it is doing.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is what I am saying. I know the witnesses cannot mirror what it is doing.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will give the Deputy an example from 2024. In 2024, there was an increase in the number of Jordanians coming in, and they came via the UK into Dublin Airport, generally. The UK had changed its visa policy with Jordan, and we surfaced that with them, worked with them and they changed their policy. The number of Jordanians then reduced again. It literally turned off like a tap in October 2024. It is not always as straightforward as that, and different people's circumstances change. The pattern changes, but we keep a close eye on it.

Deputy Joe Neville: I was wondering about new contracts with local areas and individual locations. Have we had many new contracts in 2025 and the start of 2026 with new locations?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We have had revised contracts.

Deputy Joe Neville: No, I am talking about brand new locations where somebody offers and it comes up, as may have been the case in 2022, that they have a hotel.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I will ask Mr. Delaney to come in, if that is okay.

Mr. David Delaney: Fifteen new properties were contracted in 2025.

Deputy Joe Neville: What about 2026? Have there been any new contracts so far?

Mr. David Delaney: I do not-----

Deputy Joe Neville: Would there be an intention? I just see the movement and transition. Would there be an intention to try to move away from additional new locations or how does the Department feel about that? Is there a view on that within the Department?

Mr. David Delaney: It obviously depends on supply and demand. We have definitely noticed over the past year or two that properties are getting up to the standards we require. Compliance levels have made it more challenging. We have to adapt to the realities of the numbers of people coming into the system and pressures within the system. I would not say there is a policy I would point to. We are seeking to bring on stream and have enough accommodation to accommodate people seeking international protection.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We are seeking the best value we can achieve.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is fine. That is the answer. The residents of Ryevale House sent a letter. Feedback from that letter may be required from the Department. That might be an issue to be followed up on. We can follow up separately. That is my lot. I thank the witnesses.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I thank the witnesses for staying. Am I right in saying that, since 2024, the Department has required all accommodation providers to give a declaration that they are free of any convictions for corruption, fraud or being a member of a criminal organisation? How many current providers of accommodation predate 2024 or have not renewed yet?

Mr. David Delaney: I do not have that information. We will get it for the Deputy.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is there a reason the Department has not asked those providers retrospectively to sign a declaration like that?

Mr. David Delaney: We have looked into it preliminarily. Ultimately, there was a contractual moment. To go back and revisit the contract on any basis makes it complicated because you are then effectively opening it up again. We do this as part of the pre-contracting stage. We tell providers that they must do this if we are going to sign a contract. It is a much stronger position. For that reason, we have not explored that option further. We did not want to muddy the waters on a signed and sealed contract by going back-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We are doing it at renewal.

Mr. David Delaney: That is why it is done at the renewal stage.

Deputy James Geoghegan: The Department may have made it a condition of future contracts, but the harm or risk that there are providers who may have perpetrated a crime, fraud

or corruption is totally outside the nexus of any commercial contract it might have with these providers. Why did the Department not take the decision to go back to the existing providers? Is it just purely for that reason? Why can the Department not just write to them and state that, under the new regime, there is a new declaration that providers are asked to sign?

Mr. David Delaney: It goes back to that point. It could be perceived as the opening of a closed and finalised contract.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is that the legal advice the Department received?

Mr. David Delaney: We looked into it and that was the decision we reached.

Deputy James Geoghegan: The Department looked into it and concluded that asking existing providers to sign a declaration that they have not committed a crime, perpetrated a fraud and are not a part of a criminal organisation could somehow be construed as reopening an existing contract. Was that the legal advice the Department received?

Mr. David Delaney: That was the information presented to us when we looked into the matter ourselves.

Deputy James Geoghegan: We are not allowed to comment on Government policy when we are sitting here. However, I do not understand, when it is now the case that it has arisen that accommodation providers have committed crimes-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is a very reasonable point. It is just to recognise that there are capacity issues. We have increased the due diligence as we have gained capacity in the system. It is never possible to do everything that you want to do and the pragmatic approach that has been taken is reasonable. The Deputy makes a reasonable point. We can look at the situation. It is just that recognition that you cannot do everything you want to do all the time.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I acknowledge that.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: May I make an observation? When we looked at a sample of payments for 2024, we looked for contracts, and for ten of the 20 properties, there was no contract available. If that is a representative sample, a significant number of the payments were being made on a non-contractual basis.

Deputy James Geoghegan: That reinforces the point I am trying to make. The witnesses might report back to the committee on any changes of approach the Department has adopted in relation to this particular issue. Why is it the case that the accommodation providers would not be subjected to vetting by the Garda National Vetting Bureau, rather than self-declaration?

Mr. David Delaney: The self-declaration concept and not necessarily checking the Garda vetting bureau was in line with public procurement guidelines. We are looking to align with those and not deviate from them. Those would be the normal standards for contracting, as a Civil Service entity, with a private contractor for a multitude of different services. We are in line with the norms on this issue.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Has the Department considered whether they are obliged, as providers to vulnerable people, to be subjected to vetting? People who work in those providers must be subjected to Garda-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Why did the providers themselves not have to be subjected to vetting?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Vetting is a child protection issue. That is what you are vetting against.

Deputy James Geoghegan: And vulnerable people. It is not just children but also vulnerable people.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That is absolutely the case. However, it is about the person-to-person contact. That is why you are doing the vetting.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I presume the owner can walk in the door of the premises that he or she owns.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There is definitely access restriction. I do not know exactly what it is, but you cannot just walk in the door. That is my information.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Given there have been these issues of criminality associated with a small number, or I do not even know how many, of accommodation providers, should we not provide the most robust framework we have for the management of vulnerable people? The Department is asking providers to undertake a declaration. Why should we not also ask them to be subjected to Garda vetting?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I am happy to talk to the Office of Government Procurement, but the State is procuring accommodation across a wide range of Departments. This is the standard that is applied to all procurement. We are not deviating from that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I have a final question on a separate topic, which is entries into homelessness in the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, DRHE emergency accommodation. Mr. Delaney mentioned that none of them go there directly but there were huge numbers in the previous six months. It is now the case that 36% of all people in emergency accommodation within the Dublin Region Homeless Executive are persons who were granted refugee status.

Mr. David Delaney: I do not think that is the case.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: They are non-EEA.

Deputy James Geoghegan: They are non-EEA. Okay. Close to 100% of the 36% who are non-EEA-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I do not think that is the case.

Mr. David Delaney: I do not think so. No, I do not think that is the case.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: That is not our information.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It is definitely the case that the vast majority of the non-EEA persons who are in DRHE emergency accommodation are persons who were granted refugee status and were previously in direct provision accommodation.

Mr. David Delaney: That is not the information I have.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We are happy to check that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: We can clarify that. The witnesses are aware that family reunification has become the leading migration-related reason for new presentations by families to DRHE accommodation. They will acknowledge that fact.

Mr. David Delaney: I would like to see the figures on that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I see that the DRHE has written to the Department and-----

Mr. David Delaney: As far as I am aware, I would not at any point have accommodated----

Deputy James Geoghegan: The DRHE's figures show that up to 7.1% of the new presentations relate to family reunification as the migration reason. The Department might tell a family that it is not kicking them out of an IPAS centre - I am making up this example - but the Department might tell a family that lives in Dublin to go to Donegal. Some of those families are saying they do not want to do that and present to emergency accommodation. The numbers are growing in the DRHE in that regard.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: People get family reunification outside the IPAS and international protection systems. The phrase "family reunification" can apply to all kinds of inference.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I will finish with one more point. I have completely run out of time. There is a connection here that needs to be joined up better between the exits from direct provision accommodation, even if that exit is temporarily to a friend or whatever else and those people are not going directly to the DRHE, and the impact that is having on emergency accommodation in the DRHE. The more work that can be done between the Department of justice and the persons who are exiting IPAS to ensure they get housing assistance payment, HAP, accommodation, for example, as distinct from emergency accommodation because they are homeless would mean the situation overall in terms of how we manage people who are unhoused in this country and city would be much improved.

This is a classic example where joined-up thinking is really necessary.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We invest quite a lot of effort into that, but I take the point.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I wish Ms McPhillips the best of luck in her new endeavours on, who knows, her last appearance before the public accounts committee.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Thanks Deputy.

An Cathaoirleach: I have some concluding questions. The C and AG's report of last year, which I referenced earlier, was damning. The failure whereby, of a sample of 20 properties that had been inspected, only ten had contracts in place speaks to the chaotic nature of the approach by the Department and Government to the provision of accommodation. Did that damning report initiate any review or analysis of the accommodation provided for Ukrainians and the commercial provision of accommodation?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I know the Cathaoirleach is characterising it in a different way but, from my point of view, taking on this responsibility for accommodation, the Comptroller's report was actually very timely and helpful to us in terms of doing reviews.

An Cathaoirleach: I am tight on time. What process, if any, was initiated on foot of that report with regard to Ukrainian accommodation?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The learning is integrated across the two teams. Whatever learning we have from IPAS we apply. Mr. Rowley may want to expand on that.

Mr. Conor Rowley: We have looked at that report and compared ourselves on the Ukraine side against it. We are in line with it in terms of satisfying the recommendations that are already in place.

An Cathaoirleach: Is the Department also in line with the findings whereby contracts were not in place and the same due diligence failures?

Mr. Conor Rowley: There were back in the day but we have moved on. That was 2023.

An Cathaoirleach: On foot of the report of last year, the Department is on top of it now, but it took the report from the C and AG-----

Mr. Conor Rowley: No, we were on top of it when the report came out. Also, it is useful to reference the fact that the IPAS side is far more complex than the Ukraine side.

An Cathaoirleach: What percentage of commercially provided properties did not have contracts in place?

Mr. Conor Rowley: In the early days, 2022 to 2023, it was the majority. That was retrospectively addressed and regularised. Every one of them has a contract.

An Cathaoirleach: Last year, on foot of the report, what-----

Mr. Conor Rowley: No, prior to the report, all the contracts were in place.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: In the kinds of savings that have been achieved on the Ukraine side, you can see the very tightly managed approach to commercial accommodation in particular that has been introduced over the last few years. As I said earlier and on the last day as well, the situation the State faced from 2022 to 2023, into 2024, was really acute, so it was a different thing. Savings have been made in IPAS over the last 12 months in the renegotiations of contracts. There has been about €80 million in savings made in the renegotiation of those contracts over the last 12 months as well.

An Cathaoirleach: There have been a number of high-profile cases where providers of accommodation, or where accommodation may have been planned to be provided, have taken legal action against the Department and the Government. Do we have a figure for how many litigation cases have been taken?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There are a number of cases but, obviously, there is-----

An Cathaoirleach: I am not looking for the detail. I am just looking for the figure.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: There are around four but obviously I cannot go into detail on that.

An Cathaoirleach: Do we know the value?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: They are before the courts so I would not want to go into detail on it.

An Cathaoirleach: I want to return to the issue of the ARP. The witnesses stated that the report was nearing conclusion, which I find quite bizarre. It is nearing inconclusion, yet it has led to a change of policy and a change in legislation. It is either-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I do not follow the Cathaoirleach, sorry.

An Cathaoirleach: I am referring to the review that was carried out and the report on the impact of the ARP on the private rental market. Is that complete?

Mr. Conor Rowley: It is complete but I am not too sure if it has been published or circulated yet.

An Cathaoirleach: That differs from what Mr. Rowley said earlier on. He said it was still being drafted.

Mr. Conor Rowley: I apologise for that, but it was not the sole purpose for that change. As I said, it was about aligning the payment with other EU member states. That is partly why there was a reduction in it. It was not squarely due to that.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay, but an analysis was carried out within that report of the real impact it was having on the private market-----

Mr. Conor Rowley: The real impact but also-----

An Cathaoirleach: -----and the fact it was pushing up rental costs in those areas.

Mr. Conor Rowley: It is useful to reference the Irish Red Cross report that looked at 91 of the host families, who had no intention of being landlords and had never been.

An Cathaoirleach: I am just asking about the report. I would appreciate if we could get a copy of that.

There are a number of other areas. Last year, the Minister said asylum seekers were to pay up to 40% of their income to fund accommodation under a new plan. Can we get an update as to where that plan is? Is it the intention to-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: On the contribution?

An Cathaoirleach: Yes.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Work is ongoing to bring that into being. I think we are going out to the market for a contractor to implement that.

An Cathaoirleach: It is going to be a contractor implementing that.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Yes, in part.

An Cathaoirleach: Do we have a timeframe for when we will see the detail and when that will come in?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It will be operational towards the end of this year.

An Cathaoirleach: Regarding deportation flights, we did get details, including costings, numbers of people who had been deported and locations, from the Department following our previous engagement. I want to home in on a deportation flight back in September 2025 to

Pakistan, where it was reported that 24 asylum seekers who had had their applications turned down were on board. Three of the people, it was reported, had minor offences on record but had never been sent to jail. It is reported that one had a serious criminal conviction in the UK. The stand-out number for me was that there were 79 Garda members on that flight, which was about 3.3 gardaí per individual being deported. There were other people as well, obviously, such as doctors and paramedics, which is absolutely par for the course. Why were 79 gardaí on a flight with 24 people and what costs were involved with that?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I can get the Cathaoirleach the costs but the model of deployment of An Garda Síochána is obviously a matter for An Garda Síochána. Those kinds of numbers reflect best practice elsewhere. Frontex, which is the European agency that does a lot of this--

An Cathaoirleach: It is standard across all-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It absolutely is standard-----

An Cathaoirleach: -----deportation flights to have 3.3 gardaí per individual being deported. Is that correct?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is a risk assessment. They look at the profile of the people involved. When you look at the profile on the plane, it makes an awful lot more sense. There was a very good piece of journalism done in, I think, the *Irish Examiner* around this. It is very much best practice. There is a garda on either side of the deportee, in case the person needs to go to the bathroom or whatever during the flight. There are a whole lot of arrangements around that. From time to time, we do have medical emergencies during flights-----

An Cathaoirleach: There is a set protocol then. We might get a full briefing note on that---
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Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No problem at all.

An Cathaoirleach: -----and a comparison with other flights that have taken place. The figure seems extraordinarily high but if the reasons are rational-----

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I had the same reaction when I heard it for the very first time but actually, when you see what has to be done and what is involved in it, it is a safety measure and it works very well.

An Cathaoirleach: It is reported that flight cost €474,000 to deport 24 people. Are the Garda costs built into that or is that separate?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No, the Garda costs are separate. Those are the costs arising in our Vote.

An Cathaoirleach: Does Ms McPhillips have the figures for the costs for the Garda?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We can get them.

An Cathaoirleach: Can we get that for all of the flights? The Minister has made a big play on these high-profile flights where the media is nearly invited to some of them. It would be interesting to get the true costs of them.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Just to say, what we do as well is safeguard the anonymity and the privacy of the people involved and treat them with as much dignity and respect as is possible in the circumstances. It is very difficult for them.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay.

I would like an update on the EU migration pact. There was provision for the utilisation of third countries where applications could be processed. There has been huge controversy in relation to our neighbours, who had been using Rwanda, and that has changed.

I know this is inbuilt in the migration pact. The Minister was at a number of meetings at an EU level where this was specifically discussed across EU member states. What is the approach from the Department? Has any analysis been carried out? Have any conversations taken place with third countries? What is the current position?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: We are involved in the discussions at EU level and negotiating these measures but the ultimate decisions that will be taken are policy decisions for the Government. I cannot say anything further than that.

An Cathaoirleach: Have any discussions taken place at this stage with third countries from an Irish perspective?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No.

An Cathaoirleach: Has an analysis been carried out on potential countries?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: No.

An Cathaoirleach: No work has been carried out.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Not as yet, no.

An Cathaoirleach: I want to come to an issue relating to contracts. My colleagues touched on the disclosures that anyone signing a contract has to make in regard to criminals and disclosures. Another area of huge concern is compliance with planning regulations. To bring it back to my own constituency, to my mind, probably one of the most damning and blatant breaches of planning regulations is in Kippure in west Wicklow, which is currently being used to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. Wicklow County Council issued numerous compliance orders for failed breaches. The case has been before An Bord Pleanála and it is also before the High Court. To my mind, there were flagrant breaches of planning law and regulations, yet the Department is still paying out millions. The cost that was paid for the final quarter of last year was €4.3 million. What is the approach to situations like that? Will Ms McPhillips give me the detail of that contract? What is the duration of the contract?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I am not familiar with it. David will take that question.

Mr. David Delaney: On the property in question that the Deputy mentioned, we are aware of the cases he referred to. We sought and received assurances that the portion of the property contracted for the provision of accommodation for international protection applicants is not subject to the proceedings. We have looked into this and we have got assurances that they are not properties related to those proceedings.

To give the broader policy piece, if it is the case that there are planning issues and they are brought to finalisation, whether by the local authority and nothing is appealed, or in the High Court, we would always follow the directions of a final order when it comes to planning matters. We can give assurances that the asylum seekers were accommodated on a part of the site that does not relate to-----

An Cathaoirleach: Have on-site inspections been carried out by the Department?

Mr. David Delaney: Yes, we have inspected that property.

An Cathaoirleach: Have concerns been brought to the Department's attention in terms of the potential contamination of water courses that supply 900,000 people in the Wicklow and south Dublin region?

Mr. David Delaney: We have received assurances as well that it does not relate to the accommodation.

An Cathaoirleach: Who gave those assurances?

Mr. David Delaney: That would have been the provider we contracted to provide the accommodation.

An Cathaoirleach: Has the Department carried out on-site inspections to validate that?

Mr. David Delaney: We have done inspections on the property but I do not have the details to hand on when the most recent one was done. We are aware of the cases at hand and that includes one of them. We have received assurances that the properties-----

An Cathaoirleach: What is the duration of that particular contract?

Mr. David Delaney: I do not have it to hand but I can get back to you on that.

An Cathaoirleach: That is okay. He might come back to us with it.

Mr. David Delaney: Absolutely.

An Cathaoirleach: I am acutely aware that a new contract has been entered into for The Avon. Again, when planning was granted it was to be utilised for tourism accommodation purposes. That contract was renewed for 12 months. It took a vital tourism amenity from west Wicklow and the wider Wicklow area. The purpose of Kippure was a holiday resort as well. That conflicts with what was said earlier about contracts being renegotiated and that it was intended to ensure that bed and breakfast accommodation and hotels that had been taken away from their original purpose would go back to it. That has not been the case in Wicklow.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I was referring to Ukraine when I said that.

An Cathaoirleach: The Avon had been used for Ukrainian accommodation and a new contract has been entered into to provide IPAS accommodation.

Mr. David Delaney: Could I briefly address the general point? It probably goes to some of the questions other Deputies have asked about providing accommodation for people who are waiting for an offer. We still have to renew as many contracts as we can to maintain the stock of beds that we have in the system. We are not at a point that we can release contracts. We

have obligations to accommodate people who are arriving and those who are still awaiting offers, who arrived previously. That is a key driver as well.

An Cathaoirleach: Yes, but decisions have been taken in some areas not to renew contracts on the basis of the impact they are having on the tourism industry. On the basis of analysis having been carried out, contracts have not been renewed.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It arises more with Ukraine because we are getting out of contracts to a greater degree there, but I take the point.

An Cathaoirleach: From a constituency perspective, if we look at west Wicklow, every tourism accommodation is taken up either by Ukrainians or IPAS. If we move to the east of the county, in Bray most if not all of the hotel accommodation is taken up to provide accommodation either for IPAS or for Ukrainians. Similarly, in Wicklow town a new contract has been entered into with the Grand Hotel to provide IPAS accommodation, with some revision. Thousands of beds in Wicklow have been lost to tourism purposes. There is nearly zero accommodation now available for tourism purposes. Does that feed into any deliberations from a county perspective in terms of the local impact of the loss of the amenities to the tourism industry?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: Obviously, those are commercial decisions for the providers as well. Clearly, they presumably feel that more money can be made from the guaranteed income from IPAS. We have moved a long way from where we were in 2022 and 2023 in terms of contracting accommodation. There is consideration given to what else is available in the areas.

An Cathaoirleach: This is my last question. I thank the witnesses for their time. I will go back to the inherent unfairness that people perceive with accommodation. I speak in particular of the accommodation availed of by Ukrainians, whether it is the ARP where there is no means test whatsoever or other accommodation. If we contrast that with people looking for housing supports who are on the housing list in Ireland, they have to meet an income threshold and a means test whether for a social house or to get HAP. That is in stark contrast to someone getting an untaxed payment directly to the landlord. The HAP also goes directly to the landlord. There is an inherent unfairness there. Has any analysis been carried out by the Department to ascertain what percentage of those availing of the payment, albeit that it goes directly to the landlord, are currently working and have means to be able to make a contribution?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I do not know if we have any data on that but I will come back to the Deputy if we can find any. It is not rent; obviously it is a contribution to the landlord, but it is not-----

An Cathaoirleach: It is not means-tested. Every day of the week I have people come to me who are out there working hard, irrespective of where they are from, and if they are 1 cent over an income threshold, they will not be accepted on the housing list to access any housing supports.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I take that point.

An Cathaoirleach: There are no restrictions. There is a financial impediment on the State and it should have the data on how many are working.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I do not know if we have it but if we do I will come back to the committee with it.

Mr. Conor Rowley: Some 37% of Ukrainians are working.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: I thought it was more.

Mr. Conor Rowley: It is 28,000 or 37% of people of working age, between 18 and 60.

An Cathaoirleach: We can get full data on whether they are in receipt of ARP.

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: It is the ARP split of that which I am not sure about. I repeat the point I made earlier to members, which is that the cost is €11 a night compared to €50 a night in the commercial accommodation. So in terms of value to the State, it is of considerable value.

An Cathaoirleach: Is it? We await the report in terms of its impact on the private rental market. Have the negative or knock-on consequences pushed up rents in areas due to demand? Has it put additional pressures on the market?

Ms Oonagh McPhillips: The other element of it is that it is accommodating 42,000 people.

An Cathaoirleach: It is accommodating 42,000 people. How many of those people can afford to rent privately themselves? What impact has it had on the homeless figures? What impact has it had on the limited private rental housing stock in a lot of areas. Donegal has been cited. My constituency of Wicklow has been cited. This has had an impact right across the board, so we await that report.

That concludes our engagement for today. I thank the Secretary General and her officials from the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration for attending today. I also thank the officials from the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and the Comptroller and Auditor General for their attendance once again.

Is it agreed that the clerk will seek any follow-up information and carry out any agreed actions arising from the meeting? Agreed. The committee's next meeting is on Thursday, 26 February 2026 when it will engage with officials from the Department of Education and Youth and representatives from the Department of public expenditure.

The witnesses withdrew.

The committee adjourned at 1.22 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 26 February 2026.